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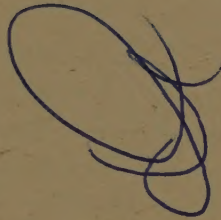
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BY LOCH AND STREAM

BOOKS ON SPORT

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THE FIRST GLIMPSE OF LOCH NUBHAIR.

BY LOCH AND STREAM

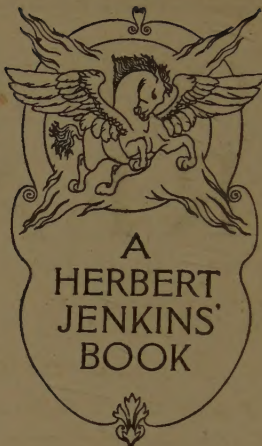
ANGLING SKETCHES BY
R. C. BRIDGETT, M.A., B.Sc.

WITH SIXTEEN
ILLUSTRATIONS

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PREFATORY NOTE

I HAVE spent many days by Loch and Stream, every one of them a happy memory, distinguished in some manner, though not necessarily by a heavy creel, and I have set myself the pleasant task of describing these in the hope that other anglers will be reminded of similar days in their experience. Some little incident noted will perhaps awake the memory of some almost forgotten day, and whenever such activity commences it may continue and produce contentment throughout a weary close season.

I venture to give some advice as to methods and lures, not deductions from haphazard or insufficient experiments, but conclusions reached after many years on many waters, tested again and again until doubt is removed. I indicate many localities in Scotland where satisfactory sport may be expected, but it will be observed that many rivers and lochs of the highest angling value are not mentioned. That, of course, is inevitable. I should be most unhappy if there were left no unfamiliar waters to fish, but, as long as I may, I shall seek them out, reduce their number all I can, and endeavour to make their fame more widely known.

The expert may find some things which do not receive his approval. I hope so. To solve all the mysteries which surround angling would constitute

a calamity, and I trust that that will never be accomplished—there is little likelihood—for it would mean that discussion was ended and one of the greatest charms of the sport would at once disappear. It is sincerely to be hoped, therefore, that some anglers will not agree with all I say. If any non-angler should, by what is written, be prevailed upon to join the happy brotherhood, then my satisfaction will be supreme.

The following chapters appeared originally in the columns of the *Glasgow Herald*, and I thank the proprietors for granting permission to republish them.

I desire also to express my indebtedness to friends who have kindly given assistance in the illustration of the book.

R. C. B.

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BY LOCH AND STREAM

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CHAPTER I

THE MYSTERY OF WATER

POSSIBLY one of the reasons why angling exercises such an overwhelming fascination over those who have succumbed to its attractions is to be found in the fact that mystery enshrouds the waters and all creatures that therein pass the whole or part of their existence. No matter how clear or how shallow the water may be, however careful our observations and painstaking our experiments, we can scarcely hope to know as much about fish and the myriad aquatic forms as we do of other living things which inhabit the same medium as ourselves. There is a mystery in water which will always continue to create a desire and, to a large extent, defy attempts to unfold it.

We wander up the banks of an unfamiliar stream, casting a fly here and there across the waving current, under overhanging boughs, beside a boulder projecting above or dimly showing beneath the surface, careless of the passing of time and perhaps heedless of the beauties of the scene, when suddenly we come upon a deep, rock-bound pool of inky blackness.

For a time the music of the white cataract has been borne to us on the breeze, but has served only to

combine with the languor of the day to soothe us into semi-consciousness. We peer into the awful depths. Over the seething cauldron the white foam-flecks float ; the waters rise and fall around the rocks as the tortured waves are tossed about ; a mass of leaves and wreckage swings to and fro, up and down ; a rainbow hangs in the spray, sending a cheer of happiness through the gloom. We know not what may lurk below the troubled surface and we almost fear to send out the flies to investigate. Surely the monarch of the stream lies in wait. Will it accept our offering ? If it does, is our skill equal to the task of overcoming its cunning strength and ponderous weight ? It does not accept and we pass on up the stream, haunted by the black, bottomless, ungenerous pool, its secrets undisclosed.

From the stern of a drifting boat we search the waters of the loch for an hour or two in vain labour. What is passing beneath ? Are there no hungry eyes to see our dainty lures ? Are we making some fatal mistake that renders impossible that welcome attention we so much desire ? We change pattern and size of flies according to old, accepted formulæ, then gleefully in answer to some sudden inspiration, then sadly at random and in despair, all in endeavour to discover something that will beget success. The breeze dies away as we row along a bed of reeds. Confidence and hope return. This is the change the trout have been longing and waiting for, and we see visions of a glorious hour. No fish responds. The reed-tops sigh and ripple to an unknown wind, a tremor passes over them, the water heaves around the straight, unyielding stems. We flee from the eeriness of the place.



"Over the rock-bound pool
The foam-flecks float."

Into another bay, cheerful with its rocks and creeks of golden sand, we row slowly that we may not disturb too much the glassy smoothness. Over it float hosts of flies, spent spinners that have given up their life that life might be continued, midges green and brown and black, tiny atoms that are yet athrill with quivering wing, great sedges that blunder through the unresisting hordes, but the waters remain undimpled and hope almost dies within us. No brown form lifts itself slowly through the silence to suck down these usually welcomed morsels.

Why is the place not alive with the rings of the leaping trout? What force is there that compels this unanimity? We may say that there is thunder in the air or that some change in the weather is impending, or with various suggestions we may strive to satisfy ourselves, but we fail; we can give no explanation, no real reason to account for the indifference displayed towards the feast lavishly spread upon the waters. It remains mysterious, something beyond our comprehension. If at all similar times the same inattention were observed, we might delude ourselves into thinking that cause and effect were clearly shown together, but we have experienced very different results under apparently the same conditions, and therefore we remain ignorant. Possibly on such happier occasions there may have been some slight alteration, unperceived or imperceptible, and having an encouraging influence over the trout, but even so it is outwith our ken—subtle, mysterious, and baffling.

Our eyes happen to wander, and away towards the foot of the loch we see a black streak stretching across. It is the wind coming to enliven us.

We throw off our feeling of weary hopelessness and prepare to meet the refreshing breeze. Is this what the trout have been awaiting? The wavelets lap cheerily upon the boat as we drift along, casting the flies before us, and almost at once we are busily engaged fighting a nimble fish. Of course we say that the wind has stirred the trout into life, bringing as it does the invigorating supply of oxygen, filling them with energy and the desire to eat. If that is so, then the process of solution must be extremely rapid and the impregnated water must acquire a great density when it sinks so quickly to the depths where the trout have been lying dormant so long.

If the loch is absolutely calm and fish are rising but will not allow us to approach within casting distance owing to the fact that in the unruffled water they become too soon aware of our presence, then we know that all will be well when the breeze comes to dim their powers of vision. On the other hand, we cannot explain satisfactorily why the arrival of the wind should sometimes arouse them at once from complete inaction into vigorous energy. We have often caught trout on the very first ripple of the breeze after hours of unrewarded toil, and therefore the oxygen theory as formulated fails to content us. It may be that trout have at times a greater desire for oxygen than for food, and that on seeing the surface disturbed after a period of calm they rush upwards to receive their main requirements. Having obtained these, they are then eager for food. This theory fits the facts better than the other, but it credits the trout with great knowledge.

We have seen Loch Leven rippling before an easterly breeze under a grey sky ; every angler and every boatman that day set out joyful and confident that all records were about to be beaten, but it turned out to be the blankest of blank days. We have seen it liberally besprinkled with Olives, and yet not a fish would stir, although a fine wave rolled along and the sun was obscured from time to time. We have taken two trout at one cast on a day on which nearly every boat was clean. We have found the trout ignoring the living insects and greedily accepting our artificials, taking these the moment they touched the water as if their arrival had been expected.

We tap the barometer, study the sky, and note the direction of the wind. If satisfied, off we go, buoyant and in haste, and the result may be unqualified defeat ; another more sensible sets out on every possible occasion without considering weather or anything else, and many a time finds fortune while we remain at home. The fact is, that while anglers know something of the art of catching trout, they know almost nothing of the fish themselves.

We all have our cherished theories, in which we firmly believe, until soon or late something occurs which makes us discard them. We think that trout are very curious, inquisitive, and jealous, and that thus a very great part of the angler's success is explained. When a hatch of flies occurs, one trout, feeling somewhat hungry, rises to select one, and other fish within range, having their attention attracted and their jealousy aroused, follow the example. Finding the flies good to eat, they continue the feast

until nothing remains. It must not be forgotten in this connection that winged insects form a small proportion of the food of trout and that they could almost be ignored altogether, but trout, fortunately, will follow a good example and do not despise luxuries.

The angler on seeing a rise takes infinite care to cover it delicately, succeeds in hooking a fish, and exhibits great and just pride in his achievement, whereas, as likely as not, the trout he captures is not the one he happened to observe, but another one altogether, which having seen the flash of the first ascending followed it up to obtain a share of the spoils. The feasibility of this suggestion is frequently forced upon one on a loch, for there it will often be noticed that even after a long blank spell two anglers operating from the same boat will hook trout almost simultaneously. Such a thing is of common occurrence, and we can think of no other explanation. In a river the case is quite different; there a trout has a definite feeding-station, into which no other dare intrude.

All anglers have had occasionally in the course of their career the happy experience of running two loch-trout at the same time, and it will be granted that only in a few cases do the rises occur precisely at the same moment. As a rule they do not, and it is usually supposed that the evolutions of the first fish hooked impart to the remaining flies a greater attractiveness, which proves irresistible to another trout. The deadliness of the "otter" is ascribed to the same cause, and we admit that most of our own successes of this kind have been gained when the first victim happened to have

selected the bob-fly, so that there is much justification for the surmise. We think that the reason given above is also partially correct, because we have observed that the second fish is invariably hooked within a few seconds of the first. We cannot hope to discover the virtues or expose the failings of trout, but must be content to class their attributes among the minor mysteries.

In our earlier days we used to find the river infinitely attractive after darkness had fallen, and many an eerie hour we have spent and many a heavy trout we have taken when it was impossible to see either hand or rod. Even then the trout would often confine their attentions solely to one of our two flies, selecting it unerringly, even after we had reversed their positions on the cast. There was no colour in the flies, for there was no light, and on some nights an all-black fly would be the favourite, while on others it would be useless. It is somewhat uncanny to find many trout, one after another, making the same unfaltering choice on the blackest night when we must blindly grope our way to a friendly fence which will guide us to the comfort of the highway. That is but another mystery surrounding water and trout that we have little hope of elucidating.

CHAPTER II

THE FOOD OF TROUT

THE great majority of anglers are interested in the various forms of life which contribute to the support of trout, for, as it is scarcely necessary to say, their knowledge of the food and feeding habits of their quarry will determine to a very appreciable extent the success and pleasure derived from the sport. Mechanical skill with the rod will accomplish much in the way of material results, but these may even be increased and additional pleasures may be obtained—for fishing has it within its power to bestow many delights—if interest is taken in everything that has even a remote connection with the pursuit of the trout.

Anglers should know what their artificial lures represent, and at what time of the season, in what varieties of water, among what surroundings, and under what conditions each one of them is appropriate. A study of such matters adds very largely to the enjoyment of fishing, and may be depended upon to assist in the filling of the creel; satisfaction is certainly produced, and any experiments conducted after thought and observation, modified in the light of experience, will, especially

if successful but even also if fruitless, be the means of preventing any day, however hopeless it may appear from a fishing point of view, becoming dreary and monotonous. We all know that hope springs up fresh and keen at every turn of the shore and at every new reach of the river ; so we are kept expectant right up to the last cast if we will but try some new lure, some change in the method of dressing a well-known fly, some alteration in its manipulation.

When we see a pool in a river or a bay in a loch dotted over with rising trout, we are apt to rush to the conclusion that flies form the major portion of their food, while the fact is quite the reverse. We often hear of lochs, failures in the angler's view, in which the trout have resorted to bottom-feeding, confining themselves entirely to it, and yet these fish may be excellent specimens of their race, which, however, have ceased to rise to the surface, for the simple reason that there is more inducement for them to remain below. This unfortunate feature of some lochs might quite readily become characteristic of all, surface-food being almost a negligible quantity, and the habit would have become universal long ago were it not for the fact that the trout is by nature a sporting fish, rejoicing to rise from the depths, leap into the air, and descend with a great swirl of satisfaction after securing its victim. We must take pains that nothing shall be allowed to destroy or modify this inclination, which is displayed principally when the fish is in good condition ; and therefore while we should strive to provide a sufficiency of sub-aqueous food, we must do our utmost to guard

against superabundance of certain kinds. Every endeavour should be made to develop as far as may be living forms, not inert but highly active, which demand before they can be captured greater activity on the part of the trout. It must be remembered that any fly seen on the water is in all probability the final development of some aquatic larva or pupa, and that therefore it has been up to that moment singularly fortunate in that it has so long managed to escape the eager eyes of a hungry trout. Of course there are occasional windfalls of flies of non-aquatic origin which are not allowed to remain neglected; but these must be considered as accidental luxuries, and need not be further mentioned.

It is a prevalent opinion that after the passing of the stone-fly about the middle of June river-trout cease to rise freely to the fly because they are thoroughly satiated with surface food. Now we do not subscribe to that belief at all. Trout, we know, become rather inattentive to our flies in the height of summer, but the reason is, we think, totally different from that usually accepted. At that season there is during the day a decided scarcity of flies, but on the other hand there is rapid development going on beneath the waters; nymphs and larvæ under the influence of the sun's warmth are making great progress and move about actively awaiting the coming of the suitable day when they will take unto themselves wings. There is consequently abundance of food below and a dearth of it above the surface, so that reluctance to rise to an artificial fly is not surprising. In addition, the trout are well fed, therefore also discriminating, and

hesitate to take anything that excites their suspicion. If, however, a spate should occur, it will always be observed that, even when it is at its height, but also when it has begun to run off, a hatch of flies is almost certain to take place, and trout are to be seen taking them greedily. The water is cooler than the air, and conditions are apparently favourable to the event, with the result that there are produced in great numbers, even in July and August, Olives and Iron Blues, flies which we are accustomed to associate only with the earlier months. Some of our best baskets, showing marked superiority to those taken in spring, have been made with the fly in summer under such circumstances, and therefore, taking all facts and observations into consideration, we conclude that, as in lochs so in rivers, trout will take the fly readily at any time of the season provided that the supply of subaqueous food is not over plentiful.

Flies do undoubtedly supply trout with a large proportion of their food, but it is principally when they are in their larval stage that they succumb, and not after they have assumed the winged state. From this it follows as a necessary consequence that the angler's lures should represent fully developed flies only when an active rise following a considerable hatch is in progress, and that at all other times they should imitate larval forms of flies on the point of transformation, and other aquatic creatures which we shall examine in due course.

In most waters the food available for the trout they contain is very varied, and may be divided into the following classes :—Crustaceans, mollusca, the

fry and spawn of fishes, and flies with aquatic larvæ. Of the first class there are several minute forms more or less familiar to everyone, e.g., water-fleas, a popular term used to include several species, among others, daphnia and cyclops, which, though individually extremely diminutive, occur in such incredible numbers that they play quite an important part in the sustenance of the trout, but, of course, their size precludes them from being of any further interest to the angler.

The larger crustaceans include the all-important fresh-water shrimp, the favourite delicacy of the trout, invaluable as a fish food, conferring the desirable redness of flesh and bringing them into a condition such as nothing else will accomplish. Everyone knows it and its erratic movements through the water as it is a native of every pond, loch, stream, and wayside ditch; in some lochs it is exceedingly plentiful; we have seen them wriggling about in the teeing boxes of a golf-course, their presence there being explained by the fact that the sand had been a short time previously watered from a neighbouring reservoir. We have caught trout that were simply gorged with them, and out of curiosity we proceeded to separate the contents of one stomach with a view to determining the number of shrimps consumed, but patience would not permit of us completing the calculation. This interesting creature is very prolific, readily introduced to newly-formed reservoirs, and the stock can be increased with the greatest ease. We do not think that there is any danger of having a superabundance of it in any water. It is not an inert creature, so that, while it could not hope to

escape in open water from a pursuing trout, it must still be captured, which is a point greatly in its favour. It prefers water of a depth such as we are accustomed to expect will yield sport, and we have proved over and over again that shrimping trout will not persistently refuse a sunk lure. It can be fairly well imitated, and several of the angler's best patterns are deadly, not because of any far-off resemblance to a fly or nymph but because between them and a shrimp there is marked similarity.

Such are the March Brown, Woodcock or Blae and Hare-lug, in fact almost any fly with rough body of herl or dubbing, and their efficacy would be increased if the wings were removed. The shade of the body may be described as an olive brown, and the material composing it should be picked out to suggest the abdominal appendages of the shrimp. Much superior counterfeits are made : we have tried them of celluloid, and while these are beautiful and lifelike imitations we find them somewhat too heavy for use in still water, demanding, in our opinion, too much motion from the rod ; in suitable reaches of the river they are good when fished downstream.

The mollusca include snails, several species of which are extremely common in some lochs and form a valuable fish food. Frequently we have captured trout which had been dining riotously on these, to such an extent, in fact, that when the fish was handled the closely packed row of shells could be distinctly felt. They may be recognised by the familiar tapering spiral shell, but it is interesting to note that in some species the spiral is almost quite flat.

A fact of very great importance—not, however, usually known—connected with fresh-water snails is that they breathe air, and must therefore generally ascend for that purpose to the surface, from which on that account they will never be far away. It is believed that they are able to make use of the air bubbles found clinging to plants, but as a rule to reach the air they require to climb up weeds, or they may manufacture a line of slime, one end of which floats as a buoy on the surface; at the other end they suspend themselves, and up the line they move when impelled by necessity. They are therefore mostly found either close to the shore or in weedy shallows. To obtain them fish are compelled to leave the depths, and therefore have every chance of seeing the angler's lure, so that though the snail itself is not at all likely to be imitated, the fact that trout are feeding on them does not indicate that any attempts at their capture are doomed to failure. We imagine, however, that too plentiful a supply of this form of food is not conducive to free-rising, and its introduction into reservoirs should, we think, be undertaken with great care.

Fish-fry, e.g., minnows, sticklebacks, perch, and the spawn of all three, form quite an appreciable part of the trout's food, and of that fact every angler has had abundant proof. The splashing of large trout in the shallows at night, the avidity with which even small fish will throw themselves on a spinning bait, the presence of partially digested specimens in the stomachs of captives, are signs which show that this is a favourite diet.

The very small fry are, however, even more readily

taken than their larger brethren, being more easily captured and of a size more suitable to the powers of any trout, a fact which is worthy of every attention, as their imitation is not impossible. These youthful fish are remarkably transparent, the head and the alimentary canal only being opaque, and consequently alone clearly visible. Some so-called artificial flies, which do not in the slightest degree resemble any winged insect, faintly remind one of a small fish. The Alexandra of the silvery body will immediately occur to most people, but fry, we submit, are not at all silvery. This "fly" in size resembles a very small fish, but in colour it imitates an adult specimen, and therefore cannot be considered satisfactory.

A much more killing lure could, we think, be made with a body of dark wool, peacock or ostrich herl, thick at the top and tapering off to a fine point—the head of a fry is disproportionately broad—and to suggest the almost transparent outer covering there could be arranged a long, clear, glistening hackle tied on sparingly in such a way that the fibres would lie along the body. This addition is not really necessary, but it will help to satisfy the demands of those who consider a hackle an indispensable adjunct to every fly. Such a lure would be easily made, and we think the idea worthy of an exhaustive trial.

Every one has at times had the experience of receiving an offer when his attention has been distracted and his eyes averted. Such a thing is of frequent occurrence, and it very probably is due to the fact that as we cease to watch the flies we unconsciously stop the movement of the rod, the

lures come to rest, behaving like hovering fry, and then excite the attentions of a hungry trout.

We now come to the class of food which is of most interest to the angler, viz., aquatic flies which spend most of their lives under water as larvæ, nymphs, and pupæ. There are so many different genera, species, and varieties of these that a lifetime's patient study would not suffice to examine thoroughly any one family. We can but hope to touch lightly the mere fringe of the subject and we confine ourselves to such flies as have come under our own observation. Of flies we shall deal with the following :—Diptera (gnats), Trichoptera (caddis-flies), Perlidæ (stone-flies), Ephemeridæ (duns).

Diptera, i.e., two-winged flies, are a numerous order comprising several thousands of species, of which we are concerned with only a few which spend their life in and about water. They undergo a complete metamorphosis, existing in larval, pupal, and winged states, and, though on the whole minute, occur in such vast numbers that trout are to a very considerable extent dependent on them. The larva of the common gnat (*culex*) is a marvellous creature having its mouth and respiratory organs situated at opposite extremities of its body. In its opinion this is an excellent arrangement, for it can suspend itself in the water head downwards so that, while it waves itself about seeking what it may devour, its other end is at the surface busily taking in air as required. In spite of the fact that it has a greater density than water it is able to perform this feat by reason of the lifting power of the surface film of water exerted on the outspread arms of its breathing apparatus. When disturbed it closes

these arms and sinks to the bottom under the action of gravity. When sufficiently developed it enters upon a pupal state or period of rest during which it does not feed, but of course it must breathe. Its air-tubes and mouth are now at the same end of its body, a remarkable change which the method of the fly's emergence demands. The perfect gnat is unfortunately unlike the final form of some other aquatic flies in that it does feed, and this food takes the form of blood whenever it is obtainable. In this case it is certainly true that "the female of the species is more deadly than the male," for it is she who is armed with and freely uses the piercing blood-sucking appliances.

The feather-midges (*chironomus*) abound in lochs, ditches, and slow-running streams. The larva is nearly as well known as the midge itself; it is crimson in colour and goes by the name of the blood-worm. It burrows in mud and sometimes rises to the surface, when a trout, following it up, may accept a Teal and Red. The perfect insect is commonly seen flying about our windows, is quite harmless, and does not seem to feed at all.

In running water we find another group (*simulium*) whose larvæ attach themselves to weeds and stones, and in suitable places they are densely packed together. Living as they do in a brisk current as a rule, they would have difficulty in passing from one place to another were it not for the fact that they spin a network of threads to serve as roads and supports. Trout take freely all forms of this fly.

These diptera are mostly very slender flies, and some of them are so extraordinarily minute that they are known as smuts, motes, and so forth.

Others, perhaps all of them, are also named not by what they are or resemble, but by what they are very capable of extracting from the angler, viz., curses. Trout are exceptionally fond of these tiny atoms, evidently regarding them as delicate dainties, and usually suck them in, ignoring the while anything the fisher can provide. Other trout again, big ones generally, will cruise around a quiet corner of a pool almost entirely covered with these insects, and rise occasionally to select one. We have had absolutely no success under such circumstances with the usual Black Gnat, though we tried it faithfully for years.

We had almost decided that "smutting" trout could not be captured when we devised a dressing which has been the means of bringing many of these fish to the creel, and now we are not at all displeased to see what used to cause us so much aggravation. The fly is simplicity itself and can be dressed by anyone in a few seconds. The hook is all-important, a short shank and a wide gape being essential, and these requirements are to be found in the Model Perfect Series; size 18 is small enough for practical purposes. Two turns of the tip of a badger cock hackle, that is one with black centre and white points, complete the fly. The white points suggest the wings and the black centre represents the body; the hook is an addition which cannot be omitted.

When these flies are on the water the angler need not expect to fill his creel, for the conditions are all against him; he will be content with a fish or two, which, however, will give him more satisfaction than a large basket taken

under more favourable circumstances. A rise to the artificial suggested, which must be fished dry, is not by any means certain, but it is an excellent lure, and has scored many victories. We have not yet tried it on the loch, the occasion never having arisen since we acquired it, but the next time we are confronted with a swarm of midges or even a hatch of the Pale Watery Dun we shall confidently send it out over the rise.

Trichoptera (caddis-flies) are well known to anglers, some of their specially deadly patterns belonging to this order—e.g., nearly all those having wings of woodcock, pheasant, grouse, and corncrake. Many of them are favourites for night-fishing, but others, like the grannom, woodcock and yellow, cinnamon and gold, are not so restricted in their use. The larvæ, belonging to many different species, inhabit all varieties of water and are all alike in one respect—namely, in that they fashion for themselves tubular cases which differ only in size and the materials used as an outer covering. Sand, gravel, shells, pieces of weed, leaves, are all utilised for this purpose, and the various components are so ingeniously combined that the density of the whole is only a little greater than that of water, and therefore the larva is able with ease to drag about what seems at first glance an impossible burden. They feed on the larvæ of other aquatic insects, and sometimes attack each other. As many a river-fisher knows, they are an excellent bait for trout in a clear water, not even inferior to the worm or creeper, but the beginner will soon learn that they are not to be dragged out of their cases; a pin applied at the narrow end will simplify the process.

On arriving at their full development they enter the pupal state, and just before doing so they seal up the opening of the case to prevent the entrance of enemies or injurious matter, but the covering in many instances takes the form of a sieve through which water can freely flow, carrying oxygen to the sleeping creature. In due course the pupa escapes from its case and seeks the air. Some can swim well and arise straight to the surface, others climb up weeds, others again crawl to the shore, where, safely arriving, they split open the pupal envelope and the perfect fly emerges. They have two pairs of wings, one pair covering the other; the upper pair are somewhat opaque, meet at an angle, and slope down over the body. Though so well provided with wings most of them are indifferent fliers, seldom if ever venturing far from the point where they emerged. The females spend their time laying eggs on weeds or bushes beside the stream, and some even descend into the water for this purpose.

As we have seen, faithful imitations are easily made; woodcock and yellow is probably as good a loch-fly as can be used, and the cinnamon sedge as dressed by Halford is the best fly we have discovered for late evening in July; cinnamon and gold will lure many a fine trout from the Perthshire lochs during summer; the grannom hatches out in great numbers in May on Tweed and Clyde and probably on most rivers.

The Perlidæ or stone-flies and their larvæ, familiarly called creepers, frequent stony, quick-flowing stretches of rivers. It is a class to which we have not given a great deal of attention, all or nearly all interest being absorbed by the large stone-fly,

the May-fly of Scottish anglers. It exists in large numbers in most rivers which provide reaches adapted to their requirements, and trout partake of them with the greatest freedom. Towards the end of May the larvæ reach the point of transformation, leave their places of concealment, and crawl to the banks, where they speedily assume the winged state. The male is somewhat smaller than the female, and is further to be distinguished by its shorter wings. Though to all appearance amply provided for flight, they do not indulge much in that exercise, never venture far from the edge of the stream, and even mate upon the ground.

When the natural flies are so easily collected and baited there is no necessity for employing any artificial. Both the creeper and the fly are deadly lures, and very probably the best baskets in numbers and average weight are taken by their means. The idea is prevalent that the creeper is obtainable only during a short period, viz., for about a fortnight at the beginning of the May-fly season, whereas the Clyde angler finds it a killing lure for trout in the month of March, and many a December grayling succumbs to its attractions. Creepers are to be found throughout the year, but certainly they will prove most effective when trout are on the look-out for them.

Members of this class may be recognised at once by the long wings which fold flat along the body, and by two stiff bristles projecting from the posterior end. We do not attach any importance to other species—e.g., the Needles, as they are popularly named, yellow, brown, and black, not that they are at all uncommon, but we have never seen trout

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taking any decided interest in them, though it is possible that in some rivers they are so plentiful that it would be advisable for the angler to possess copies. Of these, Yellow Sally is the most conspicuous, and is very often seen flitting about the river on a July day. If artificials are desired—the natural fly is too small to serve as a bait—we would recommend wingless, lightly hackled patterns, as the long, closely folded wings defy really satisfactory imitation. Some anglers declare that certain species of stone-flies inhabit still waters, but, if so, they have not yet come under our observation.

The *Ephemeridæ* for one reason or another have aroused more interest in anglers and others than any other flies we have mentioned. They are known to every one, being so readily recognised by their upright wings, and there is no water inhabited by trout which is not frequented by several members of this order. We see them on lowland loch and mountain tarn, on prattling burn and smooth-flowing river, and their arrival makes us certain of reward. The dry-fly fisher studies, collects, and copies the flies, while the wet-fly expert imitates the larvæ. They have quite a long, varied, and eventful life, and throughout it they are pursued relentlessly by the trout. Their subaqueous existence varies in length according to the species; some larvæ burrow, some swim, and some creep, but, whatever their nature, all at the appointed time gain the surface and enter the first winged state, a kind of transition between the aquatic and the state of full development. The fly is then known as a subimago, but it has still to undergo the joys or throes of

another change when it emerges as an imago, the perfected insect, with neither time, desire, nor ability to feed, with but one object in its few remaining hours, viz., the perpetuation of the race. It is now a creature of surpassing delicacy, of most fragile beauty, with wings of filmy iridescent purity, rejoicing to swing in mazy dance in the quiet evening air, over bridges or in the shade of overhanging trees.

Almost every day from beginning to end of the season there are ephemeridæ to welcome us both on loch and river. The March Brown is the first important arrival, noteworthy for its size, colour, and the heartiness of its greeting from the trout. To understand the warmth of the reception accorded to it one must be on the river some breezy April day when the sun burns brilliantly and retires as the great clouds go sailing past, when a shower of Browns is blown upon the pool and the eager trout leap noisily in all directions. Wind and March Brown and splashing trout! Would that April were here again! Then is the time to single out a worthy victim and float over it the deadly hackled fly.

The shower passes and all is quiet, but very soon, if one will but wait—and very pleasant it is to wait listening to the spring song of the birds awaking the year to life—another fleet goes drifting by, whirling eddies mark the fresh, sweet waters, and the rod curves frequently to the fighting trout. Right into the steep, swift inflowing rush the fish valiantly struggle to seize the hatching nymphs or throw themselves upon the escaping fly. The months of scarcity have passed away and the season

of plenty has come, but there are no opportunities to be lightly thrown away. April now smiles, but it may yet frown, and the flies may not be tempted forth, hence every fluttering shower is welcomed as the first.

Others, like the Olive Duns and the Iron Blues, soon arrive and our happy days become more frequent. Almost any day from April onward throughout the season we may meet either or both; they are not at all confined to spring, conditions reminiscent of spring will call them out. The Olives are a numerous company, and species may be different, but the variations are so minute that it is totally superfluous to give attention to more than a few. Three shades will suffice—pale, medium, and dark—and though we confess to a love of detail we are convinced that it is quite unnecessary to dress copies of both sexes of flies. We have never encountered trout so well up in entomology or so discriminating as to be able to distinguish the sexes; they may possess such knowledge, but they have never refused to select our imitation of the female from among a number of males sailing down the stream.

Greenwell's Glory will pass for a dark Olive, and possibly therein lies the reason for its deadliness; its gold ribbing is not a highly successful attempt to suggest segmentation, and a quill body is a decided improvement. The perky Iron Blue is a hardy insect arriving first in April, but appearing on any cold day thereafter right into September, and no greater fortune can angler have than a hatch of this diminutive fly of the dusky wing. Trout are particularly fond of it; the

heaviest specimens will rise to the delicious morsel, and, when it hatches out in company with other species, the fish will select it exclusively. We think that the Black Spider fished dry owes its efficacy largely to its resemblance to this favourite fly ; this pattern should be dressed with a body of black quill or horsehair.

On some lochs there is frequently a strong rise of ephemeridæ, while on others known to us there is a marked scarcity. Loch Dochart is exceptionally favoured in this respect, many species being there represented ; in summer a hatch is a daily occurrence, and the quantity is as remarkable as the variety. The prevalence of gulls and other waterfowl on some waters may account in part for a diminution of the natural stock of flies ; in fact we have often been made aware by the screeching of gulls that a hatch was taking place in a distant part of a loch.

Our list of ephemeridæ is far from being complete, as our desire has been to confine ourselves to those which are most worthy of the angler's attention, and some may think it strange that no mention has been made of the Green Drake, *Ephemera vulgata*, to which first place is usually given. This omission is solely due to the unfortunate fact that in Scotland, generally speaking, it is not common, although it is native to several lochs and rivers. It appears that it requires water lying over a muddy bottom in which the larvæ can burrow, and as there are many waters which seem to supply all necessary requirements, and as its introduction may not present serious difficulties, we think that some experimental work should be undertaken.

Such, then, is a brief summary of the various forms of life which constitute the principal food of trout, and further study of the subject will not fail to bring pleasure and sport to any angler. He will be enabled to read the waters more efficiently, to decide what is happening beneath, and to vary his methods according to his deductions. On the river he will not then be guilty of swinging his creeper into a deep, stagnant pool, of presenting a spinning minnow to a cruising July trout, of assailing a nymphing fish with a floating Olive, or of disturbing a fleet of Iron Blues with his cast of wet flies.

Of course trout do not always obey the rules of the game, and sometimes upset all the most careful calculations, so that even these ridiculous tactics may not invariably receive the only reward they merit, but certainly it will generally pay best to offer trout what they want. On the loch it is equally important to take pains over the selection of a lure, though it is infinitely more difficult to know in the absence of a rise what will prove acceptable. We must experiment, and by a process of exhaustion or by a stroke of luck we may discover what we seek or we may arrive more quickly at a decision by examining the contents of a trout's stomach. That unfortunately necessitates a capture, and usually we are so eager to catch another that we cannot as a rule persuade ourselves to perform the operation.

CHAPTER III

RIVER OR LOCH

THERE are very many anglers who have never cast a fly on a loch either from boat or bank, while, conversely, quite as many, we expect, have still to capture their first river-trout, and though such are of course unqualified to pass an opinion, yet unable to imagine any sport superior to their own, they do not hesitate to pronounce it the best of all. Those who have experience of both will usually, if not always, decide in favour of the river, but at the same time the preference will probably not be given without reservations.

It will be conceded by every one in possession of the necessary experience that river-fishing demands greater skill in the manipulation of the rod and a wider knowledge of trout, their food, haunts, and habits than does loch-fishing. Luck plays a great part in all angling and decides whether the creel at the end of the day will be comparatively good or excellent, but we are persuaded it is more frequently manifested on the loch than on the river. Often we see the tyro vanquishing the expert on Loch Leven and elsewhere, especially when a gale of wind raises a big wave to make casting easy and to minimise clumsiness. Throughout a season,

however, the honours, no matter how rudely disturbed by any such accident, usually remain where most deserved, unless of course luck remains a persistent attendant on the novice.

It is not often that anyone who succumbs to the lure of angling late in life—and the number of these increases daily—attempts to assail the cunning river-trout or seeks to unfold the mysteries of running water. In fact it would be vain in most cases, and despair would be the outcome, because success in that branch of angling comes only after much experience, after a long training with the worm, the minnow, and the fly in burns, streams, and rivers. It takes years to learn in the first place what parts, quite diminutive sometimes and easily overlooked, of a river will be tenanted by good fish, for this knowledge is in many cases of a kind that cannot be communicated from one angler to another. Some few there are who readily acquire the power to read the stream, while others again never do so.

For example, there are certain pools and flats in a river which, owing to their nature and surroundings, will yield good sport only if they are fished from one bank, right or left as the case may be, and certainly it is not always the easier bank nor is it necessarily the more difficult. The expert fisher can tell at a glance which side to select, and has no hesitation even on an unfamiliar stream in coming to his decision, but often it must be admitted he would find it difficult to give adequate reasons for his choice. This faculty is the product of long experience, and any angler may prove the truth of our contention if he will but visit a pool which persistently fails to yield him results commensurate with the stock it contains

and which he is always accustomed to fish from the same bank. Waders form an essential part of the angler's equipment for the river or stream if for no other reason than that they enable him to cross when and where required and so make the correct approach to a feeding trout.

Again, as already indicated, to fish a river with satisfactory results demands a facility in the handling of a rod that is not granted to every one. Casts of very different lengths must be at command; obstructions behind the angler, between him and his target, must be negotiated with confidence and the ease that comes with practice. He should be able to switch his fly or bait neatly under trees and overhanging bushes, in below a high bank, by the side of a rock, between patches of weed, across a broad, shallow stream or a narrow, deep, swift-flowing neck. All these and many other feats he must do when required, and do them moreover in such a way that his lure is not prevented or hindered from taking the same course as the natural fly he imitates would take.

These things cannot all be learned on any one river; they are easy to him who has a wide knowledge of many waters, large and small, slow and fast, wooded and open. Difficulties which appear at first glance absolutely insuperable vanish when some thought is expended. In most streams there are at least a few places which present formidable and forbidding obstacles to the angler, and in consequence the trout that congregate there and wax fat and unsuspecting are all the more desirable. They can be caught, but the method must be a variation of the usual. For instance, we have

captured some exceptionally good trout in heavily bushed streams where to cast in the orthodox manner was a sheer impossibility. Using the shortest of lengths of stout gut, carrying a hook bearing a fly either natural or artificial, we have wound the line round the rod-top, pushed the rod through the bushes, and by turning it then in the hand we have unwound the line until the fly danced on the water. Patience was up to this point required, but as soon as the lure reached its goal waiting ceased, for the answer was instantaneous. In these circumstances the landing affords even greater problems to solve, and the solution varies; a long-handled net is useful, but we have had on occasions to leave the rod unattended, to allow the fish to exhaust itself out or escape, as fortune might decree, while we entered the stream below and waded up with the net.

Some good sport we have had, too, by floating a dry fly twenty yards or even more down to a good trout feeding securely, so it seemed, under impenetrable bushes. It is exciting work hooking a big fish so far below one, but stouter tackle may safely be used for such games, because the fly and not the gut reaches the trout first, and, in addition, the fish in such retreats are so seldom alarmed that they are not so wary as they would be did they inhabit an open reach of the river.

The river-fisher cannot claim to be expert unless he is proficient in the use of all lures, wet fly, dry fly, natural fly, creeper, minnow, worm, for not any one of these will yield results as good as it is possible to obtain at all times of the season and in every condition of water. He may specialise in one or more of these lures and be quite content and

happy ; but, if so, he is not prepared for all that may transpire.

It is vastly different with the loch-fisher, who is concerned with only three lures, the wet fly, dry fly, and the minnow. The other baits are entirely out of place on loch and reservoir, and, as trolling is not a sporting, though at times a useful, method of catching trout, we exclude minnow unless it is used in conjunction with a spinning rod and casting reel. The complete loch-fisher will be expert with all three, but we expect the great majority will be content with a cast of four wet flies and a good breeze at their back. In this way the loch is handicapped because it is being denied some of its greatest possibilities and having taken away from it some of the variety which all seem to crave for and which it is eminently capable of providing.

It will be already apparent that the river holds the first place in our esteem. At the opening of the year, when all the earth is young and sweet, we rejoice to wade down the broad flats of Clyde laying our cast of wet flies across the stream and allowing them to float naturally down the current ; later, when the Olives and the Iron Blues appear, we turn our eyes to the hills and over the dimpling rise our floating fly sails daintily ; towards the end of May the creeper is the lure, followed when the appointed time arrives by the stone-fly ; thereafter we spin the minnow across the fine pools of Tweed or wander up some mountain stream casting before us the deadly worm ; then, should it be our good fortune to be able to snatch an evening, we repair to the river again to fish the gloaming rise ; when autumn comes we bid the trout a reluctant farewell

and rejoice in the more arduous work of the salmon rod. Such is the variety of the river and such is the programme of the year, but neither the one nor the other is sufficient for us, and we seek the loch when opportunity offers, for its attractions are likewise irresistible.

Second only to a day on the river is a day on the loch. With a good and willing boatman at the oars, a fine fishing breeze curling the waters, a balmy atmosphere, a sky of sun and cloud, a hatch of flies and a rise of trout, the river is entirely forgotten. Such a combination of agreeable circumstances seems rather more than erring mortals dare expect, and it is but seldom that they will all occur together; but then again, that may happen the next time we visit the loch, and in any case any one of them will in itself make the day a success. There are more hopeless, impossible, blank days on the loch than on the river, days when reward is denied and we almost weary for the end; but on the other hand the possibility is ever present that we shall remain contented throughout the day. That would indeed be a remarkable event; we never yet spent a day on either loch or river that did not leave behind it a feeling of contentment, but to remain in that agreeable frame of mind from beginning to end of a day is something we have still to experience.

The infinite variety of the river is its chief claim to superiority, but there is no lack of variety in loch fishing if the angler wanders round the banks casting at all angles to the wind, off rocky points, in sheltered bays, beside weed masses, with a rising fish now and then to cover within easy distance or at his extreme limit, but when he works from a

drifting boat down a long undefined stretch with the shores far away on every side the monotony will become almost unbearable, and trout are an absolute necessity. Then it is that the attention wanders, casting becomes mechanical, and complaints are heard about the cramping effects of the boat.

There are times, we confess, when the loch makes an even greater appeal to us than does the river—namely, on calm summer evenings when the water is unruffled by the slightest breath of wind. Probably the day has been hot and sultry and the trout have remained in the coolest depths, but when the glare passes off the water they awake to life. When only the highest peaks are aflame we push out the boat and scan eagerly the surface for the first sign of the rise that is sure to come. The boatman with noiseless oar—not that absence of noise is necessary, but we feel unwilling to disturb the silence that is over all—propels his craft slowly, cautiously, stern first along a line of reeds; past the mouth of a stream entering or leaving, across a curving bay in and out, back and forward, while we in the stern strive to lay the floating fly within the spreading circles that betray the lurking place of a goodly trout. As the shadows fall the sport progresses; when darkness descends it still continues until, at some chill breath from the hills or other signal beyond our ken, the trout retire below and we return to shore once more, there to lay upon the dewy grass and admire the gleaming trophies, many or few as the case may be, that have fallen to our efforts, the boatman's skill, but chiefly to the fascinations of the floating fly.

Loch or river? The question is needless, for both are necessary to happiness.

CHAPTER IV

LOCH-FISHING

IT is not at all surprising that loch-fishing is increasing annually in popularity, so much so, in fact, that it is becoming a common experience to find that a projected expedition must be postponed owing to the available accommodation being already overtaxed. Boats and men have to be engaged months beforehand unless disappointment is to be the result, and the time when a favourable morning would find us making a hurried preparation and setting out confident of a glorious day has gone for ever.

Though some may lament the passing of these attractive possibilities, and complain against so much advance in the demand for sport, others will find satisfaction in the knowledge that happiness is being more widely distributed. Moreover, the country has the faculty of meeting all demands, and the more that is asked from it the more it will give. New reservoirs are being made, and others are contemplated ; proprietors and tenants alike are becoming more generous in granting privileges, a refusal being exceedingly rare ; the numerous prolific and accessible lochs of Perthshire are almost without exception open to every one, in many cases no request for permission being necessary.



LOCH LUBNAIG.

Owing to pollution, brought about by, but not an unavoidable effect of, industrial development, many of our rivers have been and more are being taken away from us, and not from us only but from the whole community, for the sweet, fresh-flowing river gives beauty and pleasure through the entire valley. The careless or ignorant shepherd treating his flock among the hills of the uplands utterly destroys miles of a fine spawning stream; washings from tarred roads convey death and desolation to the head-waters; poisonous discharges from works on the lower reaches banish life and loveliness and form an impassable barrier to the silvery salmon and sportive sea-trout. It will be long before our lochs are called upon to suffer such indignities, and they will remain to beautify the country and to yield us health and sport.

The reasons for the popularity of loch-fishing are not hard to find. Every loch has an individuality, an attractiveness all its own, some feature which takes us to its shores in eagerness, some peculiarity which distinguishes it from all others. The broad expanse of Loch Leven gives us a feeling of freedom and of liberty; we may drift where we will and we know not the moment nor the place that the fly's progress will be arrested and the protesting reel will make us thrill with excitement; we know that it contains trout in countless thousands which may any day throw off their dourness, and, casting prudence to the south-east wind, hurl themselves upon their doom; that day may not have dawned for some, but in the hope that it will yet come we go again and again, full of hope and expectation.

Loch Leven is to be valued most not for

what it is but for what it brings, the pleasant companionship of our fellow-anglers, exercise in a pure invigorating atmosphere, the renewal of old and the establishment of new friendships. If in addition it grants us a few trout wherewith to satisfy the demands of honour and impress our friends with our piscatorial prowess, then surely is happiness perfected. It is doubly kind to the beginner, and if there is anyone trembling on the brink, doubtful as to whether he should allow himself to be persuaded to taste the joys of angling, let him visit Loch Leven. A cloud over the sun, a good breeze behind, a stout cast of four flies are all that are required in addition to beginners' luck ; a fish is a certainty and conversion is duly accomplished.

Other lochs give other pleasures. Loch Lomond attracts mostly because we never know what fate has in store for us ; we have been washed off by rain, blown off by wind, driven off by despair. Nowhere is the glorious uncertainty of fishing so well demonstrated. We set off from Balloch and row for Auchentullich Bay when we should have made for the Endrick Bank ; we put a minnow out behind, arrange gaff and net in readiness, for we know not what the revolving lure will attract, a salmon, sea-trout, trout, pike, or perch ; we know only what we usually get, a six-inch parr. Arriving, we put up the fly-rod and work energetically ; we raise a fine fish and play it carefully to the net. A two-pounder it is, but it is a loch-trout and it is likewise October 15, and back it has to go. And then we raise a salmon. What a glorious lunge it makes to the bob-fly, and what a great hole it makes in the water as it sinks, but we present it with the

whole cast and are left lamenting. Our luck is out; let us reel up.

Still there is great sport to be had in Loch Lomond by those who know the water and the winds, the times and the methods, and those who fish it regularly and faithfully are frequently very successful, although here again the beginner on his first visit has been known to vanquish the expert. One must be prepared for anything in the way of weather as of fish; there may be a flat calm for hours, when the islands are reproduced in the surrounding mirror of the waters, when distant boats appear gigantic above the surface and the sound of far-off oars is clearly heard. Suddenly, without the slightest warning, the winds will howl from out an innocent sky and waves will break across the boats hurrying for the shelter of the isles.

From these it is a great change to the smaller and, we may add, more generous lochs. Some there are remarkable for their beauty, others for their loneliness; some yield of their best in spring, others in the height of summer; some produce few trout of magnificent quality, others many trout of smallest dimensions; some are readily accessible, others involve expenditure of time and energy. We know the lonely hill loch where the seagulls nest and fill the air with clamorous cries, the remote tarn where the overhanging crags ever threaten to lose their hold and plunge into the dark waters beneath, the little lochan high up in the mountains where the ptarmigan loves to dwell.

We have disturbed a herd of hinds and fawns by Vennacher and watched their graceful flight to the shelter of the trees; we have seen the roe-deer shyly

drink from the waters of Loch Fad; we have stayed the rod that we might gaze upon the peregrine floating in the blue above the heights of Maragan, and have waited for the stoop that marks a mountain tragedy.

We have seen the sun rise over Strathearn and lured the trout by Ample mouth in the first hour of light; we have longed for the sun to sink behind the blue heights beyond Strathfillan that we might fish the gloaming rise around the Castle Island; we have toiled in wind and rain, in sun and heat, but not without reward, along the shores of Loch Voil; we have spent hours and days of happiness among the reeds of Islay, around the islands of Loch Ard, in the calm bays and off the breezy headlands of Loch Tay. We have but tasted of the joys of Loch Katrine, of troutful Loch Lyon, and of numerous other lochs throughout the country, just enough to make us wish and weary for more, and in every one we find something new, but always delightful.

Of reservoirs we have fished many, both near at hand and far away, and in each the trout exhibit some peculiarity however slight, some preference it may be for a certain size or pattern of fly, or they may demand only some change in the method of its presentation. The surroundings of the water itself may necessitate a complete change in the style of casting, which, duly learned, may come in very useful at other times both on loch and river.

For example, we once visited a reservoir reputed to hold good trout hard by Coulter Fell. Our first glance made us somewhat sorry that we had undertaken the journey and thrown away what might have proved a good day on the river, for a more unsuitable abode for trout could scarcely be imagined.

The water was very low and yet very deep, and lay in a cup round which the steep, almost vertical, banks sheltered it from all but the strongest gales. All down the face of the bank the favourite depths of the water were clearly marked by little paths levelled by the action of the wavelets. To the lowest of these paths we managed to go, and along it we had to pick our way carefully. The first backward cast was followed by an ominous click, the tail-fly had lost its barb ; another such disaster compelled us to learn the necessary trick, and we secured a trout or two, very fine specimens too they were, from the unpromising place. Thirty yards down the bank we saw a fish rise, and were on the point of hastening to cover it when again it rose and yet again, always nearer to us. The trout was travelling at remarkable speed within a yard of the shore, and instead of moving from position we left our fly floating in its track. Before we expected it the trout had arrived and sucked it down.

There is a little reservoir farther off in the southern uplands on the course of Peden Burn, a tributary of Potrail, where we have had some grand days with trout up to half a pound, and where we have learned much of value. Surrounded with high hills, it is protected so that a steady breeze on it is almost a thing unknown. Very often it is calm, but when the gales are out squalls come swooping down every little glen, tossing the wavelets in all directions, making it a matter of supreme difficulty to manipulate the rod and keep in touch with the flies. It is the place where one may learn the art of cheating the breeze, for nearly every day it is necessary to try it.

Again, the trout it contains are the most agile

of their race that we have encountered, quicker in their movements than even those of Loch Dochart. Many an offer we are confident passes unmarked, for very seldom indeed is the surface broken, and usually the only indication of attention is a sharp pluck at the fly which will defy detection if there is much slackness in the line. Failure to answer the offer means that the trout has gone, and great rapidity in striking must be acquired if success with these lively fish is to ensue.

On first arriving in the morning at the loch we were always sure to observe quite a number of trout congregated in shallow clear water at the very edge, and, taking all measures to conceal ourselves, we derived much amusement and instruction from watching their behaviour as we dropped a floating fly lightly over them. The event invariably called forth some answer; sometimes they would rise vertically and gulp it down, sometimes they would rise half-way and turn, sometimes they would move off in apparent disgust, but they never ignored it completely. Even though the trout are small, it is very interesting to observe the whole process from beginning to end in this way.

Let us imagine ourselves afloat on some Highland loch on a day when the sun burns brightly now and then, and a fine fishing breeze is curling the water just enough to make the boat drift at satisfactory pace and to keep the trout in lively humour. Down the long wooded shore we gently drift, casting the flies out from the boat in all directions, now sinking them deep and drawing slowly, now fishing them high and working the bob-fly all we can, now trying a long cast straight down wind, now a short cast off



THE WOODED SHORE OF LOCH ARD.

the stern, now carefully covering a rise, now aiming with precision at a rock showing dimly through the ripple. There is no lack of variety.

We halt to look around on the scene spreading out before us. We watch the shadows sweeping across the mountain sides ; we listen to the song pouring forth from the hazel-clad slopes ; we fear not the mists swinging up and down the craggy peaks or the gloom of the dark distance ; we rejoice in our labours beneath the sunlight ; to us is borne on the breeze, rising and falling, the music of the brawling torrent falling white over the rocks. We reach the point where its waters are hushed to silence in the loch and over the gravelly shallows we lay the flies with what delicacy we can, for there we know the great trout wait for what the burn may bring to them, and they do not always disappoint us, but sometimes make the fatal mistake, and the reel tells the tale to all around.

At length the drift is ended and we arrive at the headland, to find another bay opening up, down which the wind blows free from another valley. In character it will be quite different from that we have left, deep and dark, not bright and pebbly, with a bed of reeds to yield us hope, a rocky point where in the tossing wave we are sure to hook the wildly leaping trout. We tack across and across, hang in the wind over a promising place, now casting to the very shore, now searching the deeps, changing a fly now and then for luck, ever and anon working a fish to the dipping net. And then we may row ashore, and under the welcome shade partake of rest and refreshment, the while hearing the ghillie's tales of the great achievements of the past, his experiences on this and

other lochs, his accounts of great and keen fishers he has met, the prospects for the remainder of the day.

We push out the boat again and commence as eagerly as before. If sport was only mediocre in the morning, it may improve; if it was good, it may now be better. The wind may die away altogether, or it may blow away the clouds; conditions may change completely and suddenly. We cannot tell and we are glad of it, for we would rather not know. It is enough that we are on the loch enjoying whatever comes, and, should nothing come, still content with what is always there for us to see. We are on a Highland loch, and that is never tiresome, so varied are its moods, as varied as its trout; we ply the rod and, no matter how long delayed the welcome break in the wave may be, we cast, always expecting that the next attempt will have the desired result. When it comes, it may be but an inexperienced troutkin; but then it may be the trout that is every one's desire. All too soon the day passes, but its memory remains.

Seeing that there are so many beginners in the art, a few words of practical advice may not come amiss. Casting cannot be learned except by practice and by imitation, though there are certain faults which need never be acquired. The beginner has one besetting sin, and that is the use of too long a line. We cannot give in yards or feet the correct length of line, because that varies with the individual, whose first duty it is to try various lengths until he finds that with which he feels most comfortable, and that he should thereafter use on all but special occasions. This fault is not by any means confined to the tyro, for we have seen many men of many

years' experience throwing a longer line than they have the ability to use, and with it reaching inelegantly a point that a less ambitious but more capable angler could reach delicately with a line shorter by several feet. Some people seem to think that unless the rod swishes vehemently and a great long line is used they are not fishing, that is to say, that they apparently do not know that the object of fishing is to catch fish, which is a feat that no one will accomplish who puts out more line than he can extend fully in front of him.

Moreover, if one finds that it requires effort to extend the line, some mistake in the length selected or in the method of using the rod is being made. Some people purchase expensive rods and never discover the powers and possibilities that lie within them, for they use all rods, good and bad alike, in the same way, in a manner, that is, which utterly prevents them distinguishing between them. The rod must be made to work; the body should be nearly motionless. We have seen anglers whose every cast threatened to capsize the boat. It should be possible to grasp the right elbow in the left hand and execute a cast neatly without feeling the slightest discomfort or awkwardness.

Another grievous fault consists in aiming directly at the surface of the water, and it is very difficult on occasions, for example, when endeavouring to cover a rising fish, to refrain from committing this error, but it is fatal to success and must be avoided. It is not necessary to drive the flies on to the water, gravity will accomplish it far more neatly, and therefore aim should be taken at an imaginary point a yard or more vertically above the point where it is desired that they should alight.

The beginner should strive to make his line and cast fly out horizontally, and he will in time find all difficulty disappear. It will be found advisable in a high wind to check sooner than usual the forward motion of the rod, and then after a pause lower the rod slightly, giving as it were to the pull of the line. Some care should likewise be taken with the backward cast, for if badly executed the forward cast cannot be well done. The rod should scarcely pass beyond the vertical position, as if it does the flies are almost certain to strike the water behind ; that is not fatal when the angler is operating from a boat ; in fact, trout, we believe, have been thus caught, but if he is fishing a river or a loch from the bank it might end in disaster to both fly and rod. It may be avoided altogether by giving a sudden lift to the rod at the last moment of the backward motion.

In his initial efforts the beginner should make all his casts straight down wind, but if at any time he should observe a trout rising to right or left of that line he will naturally attempt to cover it, and will discover that it is a simple matter to alter the direction of his cast. Thereafter he will add a pleasing variety to his labours by casting out at all angles to the drifting boat. When the flies are safely in the water they may be subjected to an almost infinite number of motions ; they may be drawn through the water steadily or in a series of jerks, quickly or slowly, sunk deeply or kept near the surface, through or across the waves, and it must not be forgotten that in a high wind, when the boat is driving quickly, the motion of the rod will require to be much accelerated if any movement is to be communicated to the flies.

Of all the possible combinations there is one which will prove on any given day or for a certain period of a day superior to all the others, and in its discovery, by a patient process of elimination or as a result of careful deduction, lies the main secret of success. Many seem to think that all difficulties would vanish immediately if only the correct fly could be determined. There is no correct fly when a rise is not in progress, and, even when that longed-for sight appears, the virtues of the proper lure may be completely thrown away if a knowledge of its use is not added to its possession.

The angler's flies can and do represent many things ; they may resemble one thing in appearance and a totally different thing in action. When they first fall delicately on the water they will appear to the trout as flies brought there naturally of their own free will or by the action of the wind ; as they sink they will suggest flies descending to the weeds and stones to lay their eggs ; as they are drawn towards the boat they may be made to resemble nymphs swimming and resting, shrimps performing their acrobatic displays, diminutive minnows darting and hovering.

On a cast of four wet flies the ideal arrangement would appear to be to have all classes represented, imitated as to form and colour as faithfully as possible, and to vary the motion of the cast so that at any one moment one type at least shall act as the creature it copies is in the habit of acting. An alternative method would consist in having all flies on the cast of the same type and in using it only in the way appropriate to that type. This system would necessitate one having a number

of casts, but it is superior to the first method, which might be used solely for experimental purposes to determine which form of food is proving most acceptable at the time to the trout. Most people have, on finding a certain fly accounting for every trout of the day, replaced the remaining three flies with the killing variety and added in no way to their sport, the original lure as likely as not alone remaining deadly. Position on the cast, distance below the surface, and behaviour are all important and affect materially the attractiveness of the lure.

We do well to take pains to make and use a wet fly in imitation of some particular creature, but it is not entirely necessary. A trout as a rule is very quick in its movements, and does not, as we have frequently observed, take time to make a careful inspection of what is brought before it; we are, of course, leaving out of consideration occasions of nymphal activity or the advent of a hatch. Our object must always be to present something having an appearance of life, something that will flash as it moves and turns in the water, that is, in short, to supply the force which impels the trout to single out its victim from a shoal of hovering minnows, to select the one uneasy member of a number of resting nymphs. The tinsel on the body, the glistening hackle points, the markings on the wing will all throw out the signal that arrests the attention of the expectant trout. Let the direction and the motion of the lures change continually, and sooner or later, sooner than usual we are sure, their movement will be stopped and the rod will assume the welcome curve.

CHAPTER V

LOCH ARD

AFTER five long weary months of waiting we at last find ourselves engaged in making extensive preparations for the first expedition of the season. Loch Ard, the beautiful loch near the Clachan of Aberfoyle, is selected for our initial efforts, not only because of its well-established reputation for "earliness," but partly also because of its being within comparatively easy reach. None but an angler can realise our eagerness to be afloat once more, and no one can sympathise so well with us in the impatience we display at delays incurred in launching and preparing the craft. Again we are putting the rod together, fixing the reel, threading the line through the rings, and attaching the cast of carefully selected gut. At length all is ready, and we embark to put our fortunes to the test.

The sky is heavy with cloud, the cheering sun is absent this March morning, and the wind is light and fluky from the east. We are none too hopeful under such conditions, but we are out once more, the close season has passed away, and nothing more is needed to bring contentment. Down the northern shore we work our way, drifting

being unfortunately rendered impossible by the variable breeze, in and out little bays, laying the flies under the leafless trees, close to the rocks, beside yellow, crackling reeds, now trying the shallows, now searching the deeps, and soon, even before we become weary, the welcome signal appears on the surface. The Butcher, never to be denied, has claimed the first victim, and we play it cautiously and tenderly to the net. Our patience will not always be so exemplary, but then, this is the first trout of the season, and infinitely desirable. A comely half-pounder, plump and in absolutely perfect condition it proves to be, a worthy beginning, and we feel that the day is already a success.

We are using a cast of standard Loch Leven flies, their only distinguishing feature being that they are dressed on heavy irons for the express purpose of making them sink rapidly down to the low-lying trout. They demand a little extra care in manipulation, a more gentle lowering to the water so that they will not produce the splash that creates suspicion and causes the willing trout to hesitate. Not always do we accomplish what we try, but the selection of flies, the treatment they are given, and the general tactics employed must be declared good, for, almost as quickly as we could desire, five more fish come to keep the first one company. One of these is a heavier specimen, fully three-quarters of a pound, but not one can in condition compare with the first, though all are in that respect satisfactory.

And now comes on a long, quiet spell, during which there is not the slightest response to our most careful efforts, and we wonder if we must

conclude that the day is over. It may be, but of that we shall require much more persuasion. Not a single fly, not one natural rise has been seen all day, so that there is nothing to guide us, and we search for an excuse for changing a fly. The Blae and Black, probably our most cherished pattern in springtime, has alone of the quartette proved of no avail; it may yet be too early for that hardy insect, and the fish do not know it as they will in a few days when the hordes appear. Meantime it is not worthy of its place, and for it we substitute a Woodcock and Yellow, a most useful lure later in the year, and even at any time when doubt assails the angler. Its proper place on the cast is second or third, according as the flies are being fished high or low in the water.

The change is immediately successful beyond all expectation, a broad flank gleams beneath the fly, and we strike deep into a heavy fish. It at once plunges for the deep, boring and tugging wildly, but we feel that the hold is good, know that the cast is sound, and we allow little liberty. The fight is short and sharp, and as the trout glides into the net we find we are not deceived in our estimate, for it just fails to pull down a pound and a half. Its condition may not be quite first class, but it is nevertheless remarkably good, and we shall in all likelihood have to make many expeditions before we succeed in landing a superior specimen.

The success of the conspicuous Woodcock and Yellow does not begin and end here, but instead that lure attracts to itself all attention, leaving the remaining flies merely to balance the cast. In rapid succession it accounts for four more dainty

trout, and then is born the conviction, well known to all anglers, that further labour will be wholly vain. Doubtlessly the storm of rain, driving over and blotting out the opposing heights, assists the decision that the short day is at an end.

We have good reason to be satisfied, for the eleven fish laid out on the stern seat present a beautiful picture. There they are, tapering from the pride of the basket down to the liveliest of all, a nimble quarter-pounder; the light plays over them as the boat rises and falls to the wave; the brilliant colours, the green, the bronze, and the gold mingle and separate, come and go. No two fish are the same; we see the true native, the wanderer from some hill burn, the interloper from Loch Leven. We might dismiss the subject with an entry in the diary:—March 12, Loch Ard, 11 trout, 6 lb., best fish 1 lb. 7 oz., and therein lies much satisfaction, but it has much more significance for an angler. It means that the period of waiting has passed away and that the season of happiness has dawned; the trout are once more ready to receive us and we may seek them when we can; before us lie many days to be spent on the loch and by the stream, days of sunshine and of cloud, days of storm and calm, in pleasant company on Loch Leven, or alone by the moorland tarn and flowing river. And wherever we go we shall forget all but the pleasant labour of the rod, banish all care, and enjoy the music of the waters, the play of the leaping trout, and the scented breeze of the grassy holms. In due time will come again the quiet hours at eventide, the hot days in leafy glens; the promise has been given.

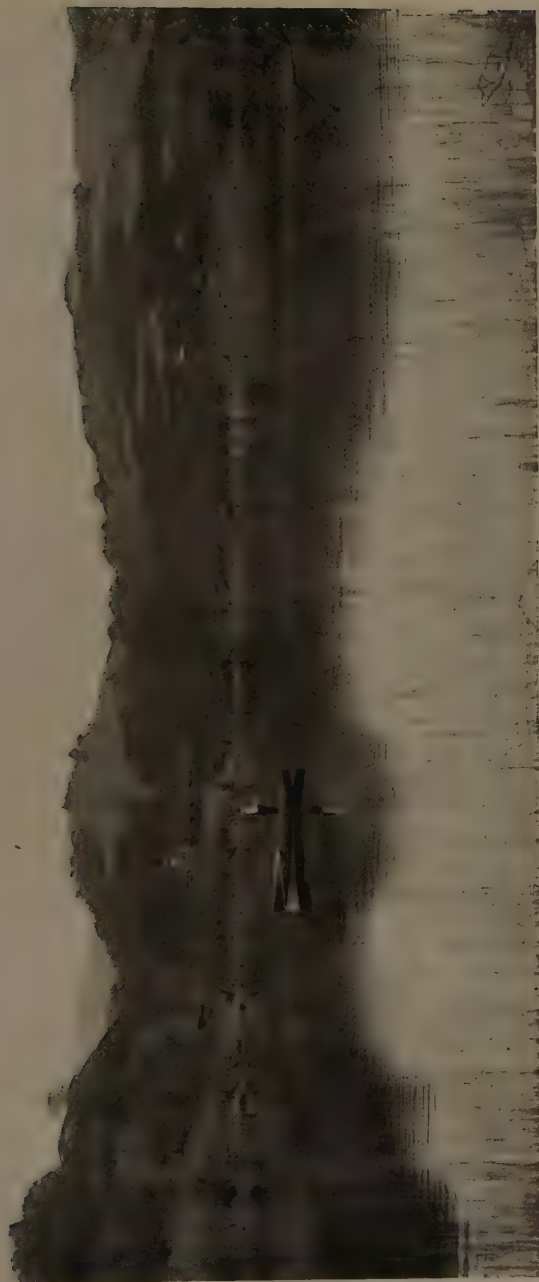
We have made many visits to Loch Ard during the last few years, and we find it exceedingly attractive. Hard things have frequently been said against it, but with these we cannot agree, as our experiences lead us rather to give a highly favourable report. Never have we had a blank day on it, a fact which itself would make us thankful, but again we have still to enjoy a really good day, such as has been granted to some who have found it in generous mood.

The chief complaint we have to make against Loch Ard is that it has never favoured us with a good fishing breeze; surrounded as it is with high hills which cut off or deflect the wind, it is probably only occasionally that conditions will be satisfactory in this respect. We have lain becalmed for hours—a quite welcome state when fish are rising, but a weariness of the flesh when the surface remains unbroken—and we have expended much energy chasing wind-patches all over the loch, but, possibly due only to bad luck, never have we enjoyed a drift of more than a hundred yards. Frequently, too, the wind blows directly at right angles to the shore, a feature which occasions no complaints on a broad bay or shallow, but which in all other circumstances means discomfort for one angler when two are operating from the same craft. Therefore for Loch Ard we would advise one angler, one boat, if the maximum of sport is desired, but on the loch we desire company as well as sport.

After exhaustive trials and what appears sufficient experience, we have come to the conclusion that after the end of March the secret of success

on Loch Ard lies in the use of very fine gut and small flies of sombre hue. Our best day was one in May, when the breeze was very light and often died completely away; fish were rising now and then, but not one of them would accept a loch fly of the sizes in general use; a cast of Clyde flies proved their undoing. We have tried the loch on a hopeless day of August, when the same conclusion was forced upon us. We are convinced that if anglers use such flies as March Brown and Greenwell's Glory of small size they will cease to complain of the meagre aggregate and average weight that they are accustomed to associate with Loch Ard. The trout captured should weigh two or at worst three to the pound, and there are few open lochs where a better average than that is obtainable. Also one will be very unfortunate in his choice of day if his basket weighs less than five pounds, not an exciting figure, certainly, but yet satisfactory to most people. Moreover the loch is exceedingly picturesque, even in early spring; the islets and wooded shores may not then be so beautiful as they will be later, but the hills will never fail to hold the attention.

The choice of fishing ground may well be left to the boatman, but it will always, of course, be regulated by the strength and direction of the breeze. On the north shore, where most sport will be forthcoming on the earliest days of the season, there is one bay, viz., the Bloody Bay, which by its name alone will make the angler hopeful, but all down this side there are parts which, whenever he sees them, he will fish with confidence. Even though no rising fish be seen,



IN COULICARTAN BAY.

he knows intuitively that something awaits below, and if the welcome response is not given it is but because the favourable moment has not arrived. Our favourite stretches, however, are on the opposite shore, around the islands, on the broad reed-encircled shallow, and in the great bay of Couligartan ; many a pleasant hour we have spent in these parts, and many a fine trout we have there lured to its doom.

We appreciate Loch Ard in many ways and for many reasons, but possibly we hold it in regard chiefly because it welcomes us sooner than do other lochs. We may, as a rule, be promised more than we receive, but, provided only that the wind does not fall to rest, we are always kept at attention, covering a rising fish, aiming carefully at a clearing in the reeds, experimenting with various types and sizes of flies, humouring a wildly plunging trout, enjoying the infinite variety of the scene and the sport, and we care not how soon we see it again.

CHAPTER VI

LOCH LUBNAIG IN MARCH

LONG have we known that Loch Lubnaig is an early loch, where on a favourable day in April a fair basket of hard-fighting half-pounders in the very best of condition is a certainty, but never until this year have we been prevailed upon to visit it in the usually trying month of March. One or two mild moist days at the beginning of the month were sufficient to induce a touch of the angling fever and to arouse the passions, which had long lain almost dormant, to such an extent that it was a simple matter to arrange a visit to Strathyre, the picturesque little hamlet situated about a mile from the head of the loch. Nine boon brethren of the angle made the journey, and none regretted having sought thus early to lure with the fly the wily trout.

There is no question that Loch Lubnaig is a beautiful sheet of water possessing a coast-line distinguished by infinite diversity of outline, a feature which is not without considerable effect upon the angler, for, whenever he rounds another little rocky headland or projecting gravelly point, or approaches some tiny, trickling tributary stream, his energies are renewed, his hopes, if perchance they should be

waning, revive, with the result that his basket almost invariably becomes heavier. Lying as it does under the shadow of lofty mountains, their steep sides scarred and torn with deep, dark corries, filled at this season with sparkling snow, the loch may at times be characterised as gloomy and sullen, but when the trees are in leaf and the rippling wavelets reflect the sunlight, then the scene is one of surpassing beauty.

The bed of the loch is as diversified as its shores, for here at its head the River Balvaig enters and has deposited great beds of sand through which it threads a tortuous course. To these shallows, readily warmed by the spring sun, the trout resort to satisfy their appetites, and a good boatman with a thorough knowledge of these feeding-grounds is consequently very necessary if one would desire to make the most of the opportunities of sport often here provided. There are broad lagoons, too, of ideal depth plentifully supplied with weeds harbouring larvæ in which trout delight, which, though probably unfishable later in the season, yield in spring many a lusty fish.

After a leisurely substantial breakfast at the Station Hotel we made our way towards the scene of our labours, each man provided with a trolling-rod and a daintier weapon wherewith to cast the seductive fly. Until midday the former was mostly in evidence, for it was reported that already a number of salmon had accomplished the strenuous journey through the brawling, foam-flecked Leny and were now cruising about the more peaceful waters of the loch in eager search of phantoms blue or phantoms red or phantoms of any intermediate

shade. Their eyesight, however, probably dimmed by the turgid flood of Forth, availed them little, for they completely failed to discern the nine several specimens that for two solid hours were dragged hither and thither for their entertainment. Some of our number, fresh from mighty conquests in the prolific waters of far Loch Ness, sanguine of success, displayed commendable persistence, but by noon all, with one outstanding exception, laid aside the unprofitable lure and took up the nimble rod of cane or greenheart and proceeded to search the shores and bays with a cast of four Loch Leven flies.

This decision won unqualified approval from the toiling boatmen, who, though of opinion that we were at least a month too soon, were quite ready to support a proposal which promised them some measure of relief from their labours. Almost immediately sport was forthcoming, for though trout were not seen rising to the natural fly, they were not averse to sampling our lures. For an hour we cast assiduously and not without hope. The air was balmy, the wind but gentle, the sun shone brilliantly, and, in short, the conditions were more reminiscent of May, so that it was hard to realise that a full third of March had still to run. The tail-fly had apparently the most decided attractiveness, for, while it was to a Woodcock and Yellow that the first trout succumbed, the majority of the later arrivals ignored it, but evinced a decided partiality to the justly famed Peter Ross, a lure which, by the way, was invented in this locality. The March Brown, which had seemed to us a suitable pattern to present for the trout's acceptance, was not doing its duty and was removed, its place being taken by a Blae

and Black, a fly which may be confidently expected to give a good account of itself at any period of the season. The change was justified, two trout in prime condition almost immediately and in rapid succession finding it irresistible.

Very few rises were missed, or at least so it seemed, but as the majority of the trout took the fly well under water, betraying themselves sometimes by a momentary flash, again by a decided sharp pluck on the line, and sometimes without giving any indication of their attentions, it is quite possible that some offers were unmarked. We confess that once or twice in the course of the day we got a trout which we did not deserve, as it was only when we were preparing for another cast that we were made aware of their presence. These had been kind enough to hook themselves without any assistance from us, a stroke of luck we do not hesitate to accept, knowing too well that later in the season it will be denied us. On the other hand, we were delighted and thrilled to see a good trout making a glorious lunge at our bob-fly as it came tripping across the waves, a sight we do not expect to see until the trout have had some experience of surface insects. It was securely hooked and successfully netted after quite a spirited fight, for the trout of Loch Lubnaig are no weaklings, and give very superior sport on fine tackle.

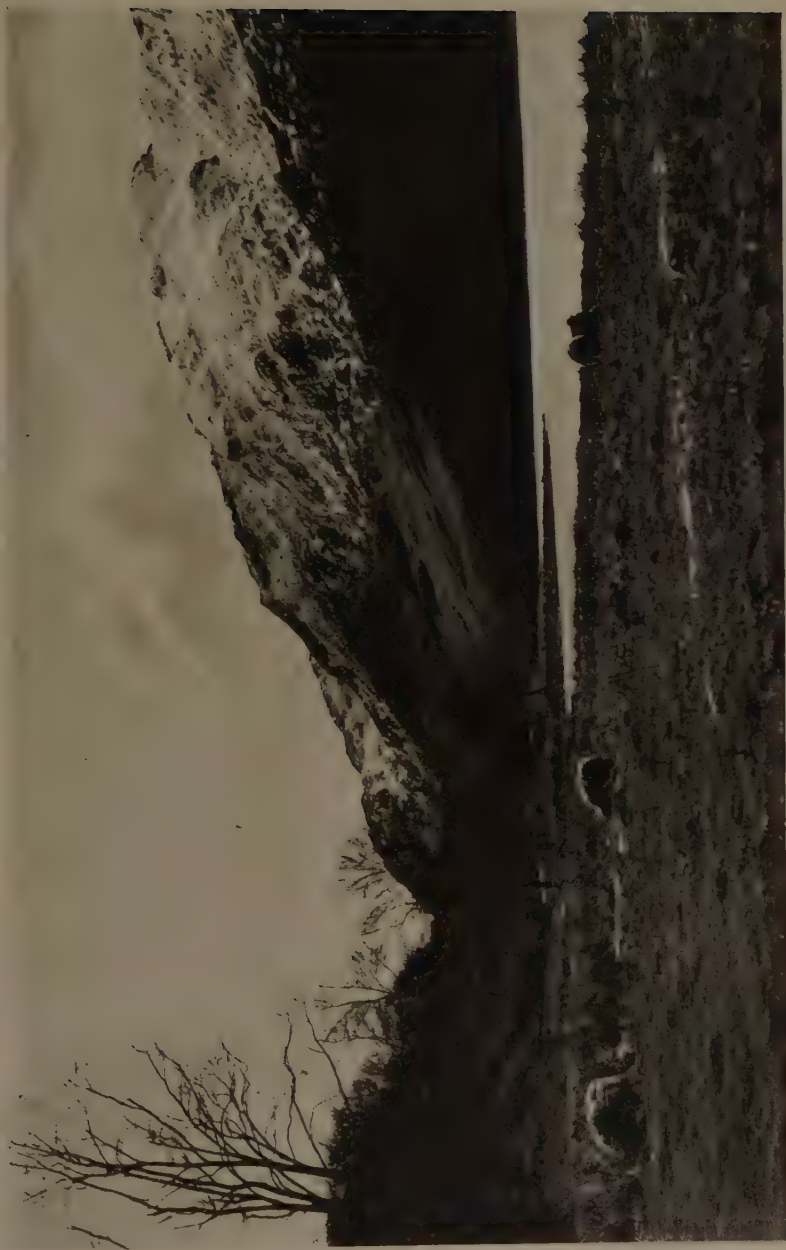
At 1 p.m. precisely all the boats, as if under the influence of some magnetic attraction, as indeed was the case, converged with haste towards a well-defined spot known as the Doctor's Point, while on the road, hurrying for the same place, could be seen a motor-car. Boatmen and anglers alike displayed considerable interest in this phenomenon, which is

not surprising, as the simple explanation is that it betokened the advent of lunch. All, arrayed somewhat in the manner of Arctic explorers or aviators, having prepared for weather of a much less genial and more probable description than we were favoured with, hurried stiffly ashore, and squatted around in attitudes of varying elegance. The Irish stew, served on plates almost too hot to hold, was food for the gods, and knives and forks were plied with assiduity, while blessings were showered upon the man whose genius had rendered such things possible as well as on those who had prepared and conveyed the banquet.

Baskets were compared, and the total worked out to twenty-nine trout, a number which made certain that every man of the company would enjoy at breakfast on the morrow his first trout of the season. The talk now was all of the wonderful weather, the killing flies, the condition of the trout, and the most fishful bays.

When the inner man was finally satisfied we embarked, determined to double, if possible, the total catch. Some returned to fish again parts that had already yielded sport, while others sought new ground, but all remained on the eastern shore, a wise proceeding, for there the sun-warmed water might be calculated to waken into activity the fly-larvæ and nymphs and consequently the trout also.

Round Ardchullarie Bay the boatman worked our craft, while we plied our rods to such good purpose that we did not cease our labours until altogether twenty good trout graced the boat. The manner of their capture differed in no wise from that of their predecessors, and calls for no comment. One fact



LOCH LUBNAIG IN MARCH.

forcibly impressed upon us, though well known already, was that in early spring the flies should be fished well sunk. To this end the rod-point should be kept near the surface of the water and over the end of the boat, not in the direction of the boat's path. By this means the line is kept taut, and an offering trout may be readily detected, although the rise, if such it can be called, be quite invisible. The trained eye of the angler can, however, often pierce the depths and see the flash as soon as, or rather before, he feels the pluck that calls forth the answering strike.

Soon, too soon, the sun sank behind the lofty heights, the air became decidedly chilly, and we were pleased to cease casting and steer straight for home. Of course, the minnows were again allowed to spin astern, but the result was the same as had attended our previous efforts in this direction. We arrived to find that our choice of fishing-ground had been exceedingly happy, for the total catch of the day numbered fifty trout, which were proved by the hotel scales to average rather more than half a pound. Now that appears to be a most excellent result for a day in March, and we question very much if any other loch could have done better. If there is such a loch, we would be glad to hear of it, but Loch Lubnaig is undoubtedly a water where surprising sport may be had very early in the season, while another point in its favour is that it is very accessible, and yet another is that the creature comforts so desirable on any fishing expedition are there readily obtainable.

CHAPTER VII

LOCH NUBHAIR

MANY happy days we have spent on Loch Nubhair, that fine, extensive sheet of water situated at the head of Glen Dochart, but all of them pass into insignificance when compared with our latest experience. Neither a heavy creel nor a remarkable trout gave the day its importance ; these may be sometimes necessary, but fortunately there are other factors which will render a fishing expedition memorable.

We awake to find the little hamlet of Strathyre silent under a blinding snowstorm ; all around the heights lie deep in snow, but already the sunshine is lighting up the thickly falling flakes, and gradually dispels the hopelessness that has almost laid its grip upon us. An impossible day for fishing the impatient anglers decide, and we agree, but are not deterred by the wintry conditions. We may not catch fish, but we may certainly fish. That is enough for us at the dawning of the season, and off we set to find enjoyment at least in the rush through the sparkling air. Up the long, wild Glen Ogle we speedily soar, on all sides the dazzling whiteness, in front the road winding and rising ; the wind from off the cold heights nips shrewdly, but there is life

in it, and it is good to breathe. The little lochan Larigheelie at the crest is blue and rippling, a deeper blue than the sky above, but we answer not its invitation ; our goal lies yet far ahead. Down the steep slope to Lix we coast, on to the valley of the Dochart, where we never yet went without hope, but to-day it is hard to remain sanguine. We bear away to the west, cheerless Ben More ever calling us forward, and at length we draw up on the shore of Nubhair.

However bad the prospects, we mount the rod in eager haste, attach the cast of heavy-ironed flies, and with high step stalk through the snow to the water's edge. We know that coast-line as probably we know no other, for many a time under summer skies and before balmier breezes we have drifted along it casting before us the flies that not for long went unrewarded. We know the mouths of the merry streamlets, the banks whereon later the weeds spring up, the projecting points which warn us to take a little extra care and follow with more watchful eye the questing flies. Even at this season these will probably be the most fruitful spots, and as we search them, our memory busy with days gone by and our eyes wandering over the scene so strange yet so familiar, we are suddenly made aware by an unaccepted offer that one trout at least has found our lures worthy of attention. We are aroused into carefulness, mechanical casting ceases, and we strive to lay the flies far out across the fresh breeze.

We sink the lures and nurse them carefully shorewards, at times allowing the wind to exert its whole effect on the line, at others giving the rod the entire work to do, and it is not long before

there is a break in the water, which is answered in time to send the hook home. The March Brown nymph has secured a victim, whether from a close resemblance to that creature or only because it awakened interest and not suspicion, we do not know, but we play the captive cautiously to the bank, and run him safely on the snowy grass. Its condition is not perfect, but the next fish taken is a magnificent, beautifully-proportioned trout, as fine a half-pounder as ever we have seen, which must have been dining well for weeks before. Its mouth is filled to the very lips with the nymphs of the Blae and Black, but the specimen it took last concealed within it the fatal barb.

We soon learn that the trout are lying far off shore, almost but not quite beyond our reach ; the icy water from the melting snow filtering into the loch or rushing down the swelling burns is driving the fish away from the banks to look for comfort in deeper water. We change our tactics accordingly, avoiding the gravelly shallows and the vicinity of the tributary streams, striving to reach the deeper water and those places which soon shall be rendered unfishable by the weeds.

Unfortunately a boat is not procurable so early in the season, but we cannot think it a serious handicap, for trout are offering frequently enough and we are contented. We enjoy wandering up and down the banks of a loch ; it is more interesting than drifting. The breeze may continue steady in direction, but the coast-line varies ; occasionally the cast is straight down wind, usually it is across its path, but often it must be delivered right into the teeth of the wind. Therefore there is something to accomplish,

and a cast against a stiff breeze neatly executed yields considerable satisfaction, but, if by means of it a good trout is hooked, then the angler has justification for being pleased with himself. So the art of casting is learned as it can never be if one always has a boat from which to perform. We continue to work the rod and not without success. The blank periods are not so long as to produce weariness or despair ; we are fishing under conditions of a nature novel to us and interest is consequently maintained.

The trout amaze us in that they exhibit an utter lack of uniformity in their methods of attack. Now one will thrill us with a sharp pull under water ; now the fall of the fly and the rise will occur almost simultaneously ; now one will make a wild splash at the tripping bob-fly ; now one will break the surface as he turns to seize the sunken lure. These offers are not by any means all accepted, for it is difficult to be prepared to answer all as they should be, but an agreeable percentage take firm hold and are safely brought to bank. The fine half-pounder is joined by two others of like size and quality, and though we continue for a while in the hope of securing a heavier specimen we do not succeed. We wander back along the bank, picking up the slain trout as we proceed, and find when we arrive at the starting-point we have collected no fewer than eleven fish. Though they weigh slightly less than four pounds, we consider that our two hours' fishing has been amply recompensed, for we have enjoyed a new experience and caught trout of very fair quality on the fly under conditions which, we confess, we considered impossible.

It is probable that every passer-by on the roadway

gave us his sincere sympathy, and was prevented only by the snow from coming to give us sound advice, but, however ridiculous fishing may have seemed, the important fact remains that trout were inclined to feed and fit to be captured. The results go to prove that anglers are apt to give too much consideration to the weather, and sometimes stay at home when good sport and supreme enjoyment await them beside the loch. We actually saw one trout rise to the natural fly, and when we cast over it it rose again beautifully, but failed to take hold, or perhaps we made an error in timing the strike.

Loch Nubhair is well deserving a visit. It holds a large stock of trout which on suitable days furnish sport of a very high order. In July and August it is not to be compared with Loch Dochart in sport-giving capacity, though many will prefer it even then because of the prevalence of weeds in the latter loch. It fishes best towards the beginning of the season, in April and May, and we are led by our experience to the conclusion that a good stiff breeze is required for the best results. It is then that the large trout, which unquestionably are there, may be lured, but a quiet evening in June is likewise not unlikely to witness the circumvention of many an experienced fish.

The most fruitful parts are readily distinguished. Off the mouth of the short river which connects Nubhair with Loch Dochart there is a long, broad shallow fringed on one side with reeds that almost invariably contains at least a few feeding fish; the low-lying south shore, with its numerous curving bays and frequent streamlets, its weed-masses and projecting points is our chief favourite; the tree-



AT THE HEAD OF GLEN DOCHART.

shaded, rocky north shore is always worthy of a careful drift, but probably the most interesting parts of all are situated at the east end, where the River Dochart leaves for its journey towards Loch Tay.

In summer the scene is of the most entrancing beauty ; the dark, dense woods at the base of the lofty hills form a suitable background for the sparkling waters ; Place's Bay will keep the angler busily and profitably employed for hours, a great wide-sweeping bay of fine fishing depth. The river seems unwilling to leave the loch, winding broad and slow between the pine-clad shores, curving into unexpected reed-encircled bays, and every cast towards the verge is a hopeful cast, keeping the attention ever fixed. When the gales are out on the main loch, we would seek these more sheltered reaches, feeling certain to find happiness. We wish we could be there in June as twilight falls, casting along the reeds over the dimpling rises, for we are confident that many heavy fish would be moving about, and we might have the fortune to hook one or more of them.

The salmon of Loch Tay, after resting a while in the quiet loch, prepare for the strenuous passage through the turbulent waters by Killin Bridge, move up the River Dochart, and seek rest again in Nubhair. There any day a number of them may be seen noisily rising, but though their favourite haunts are well known, they are seldom taken. They have been assailed with fly and minnow, and in fact by every conceivable lure, but in spite of all efforts they will not accept. No doubt they are somewhat stale after their long and varied journey from the grey North Sea, but they will continue to

make us attempt their capture. Some day we may hook one on the fly and forget at once all previous failures.

An expedition to Loch Nubhair is one that we are always pleased to make, for we know its great attractiveness. We watch the shadows swinging across the mighty slopes of Ben More, the wavelets gleaming under a westerly breeze, the trout rising confidently along the reeds ; principally do we know that the loch is generous, and that we shall never be sent empty away.

CHAPTER VIII

AN APRIL DAY ON CLYDE

WHEN the end of April threatens to arrive without our having had an opportunity to visit the river in quest of sport, a feeling akin to desperation is wont to seize us and we throw all prudence to the winds. The day intended for early fly-fishing should be carefully selected, as, though the basket of the season may be taken in April if the weather conditions are very favourable, there are many days when very mediocre results are alone possible. It is certainly true that there are days at other periods of the angling season which are likewise characterised by a similar disinclination on the part of the trout to accept our lures, but, when such is found to be the case, the outing is otherwise usually most enjoyable, for such a condition of things points to clear, cloudless skies and unruffled waters. Selection of a day was denied us; further delays would mean the loss of an April day by the river, a hardship to the making of which we could not consent to contribute. Our choice was the Clyde, and the selected reach was that succession of delightful pools and streams at Coulter.

Our usual good fortune seemed to have completely

deserted us, for we arrived to find Tinto and the surrounding lesser heights gleaming white with snow, but, on the other hand, there was an undoubted warmth in the sun, and the breeze, although from the north-east, was of the gentlest. The rod was quickly put together, a fine cast selected, and then we lay down on a sun-warmed shelf of rock beside a promising pool to await developments.

The snow was fading visibly away; the still atmosphere was reminiscent of a June evening; a hatch-out of ephemeridæ, Olive Duns most probably, seemed likely to occur at any moment, so that our waiting was not so absurd as might at first appear. In any case it was not of long duration, for in the "glass edge" beside the swiftly flowing current at the neck of the pool a trout was seen to rise in that quiet fashion which usually betokens weight. The fly had escaped our notice, but more probably the trout had taken no fly but a nymph rising to burst from its envelope. We decided first to try the reliable Greenwell's Glory, so a brand-new specimen was attached and anointed. Crossing over to circumvent the perilous "drag," we made our cast straight upstream, and laid the fly daintily on the exact spot indicated. It was accepted at once, and a really fine trout dashed headlong into the strong current, but after a short, sharp struggle the hold gave way, and we were left lamenting the loss of another monster.

This was doubly unfortunate, for, as if to complete our misery, the weather entirely changed. A strong breeze set in from the south-west, later developing into half a gale, and the sky became clouded, though now and then the sun would burst

through to cheer our drooping spirits and to raise within us a faint hope that some time the longed-for flies would arrive. For two hours no sign of life was visible, and we had perforce to content ourselves with casting on the maligned "chuck-and-chance-it" principle. Such a procedure is liable to become monotonous, that is if quite unaccompanied by success, but we were fortunate enough to encounter three very fair trout which were willing to accept our lures. After they were laid to rest in the creel our faith revived and the prospect became decidedly more pleasant, for, though we can and do thoroughly appreciate the myriad beauties around the river, our supreme object is to catch trout with the fly, with the most delicate materials possible, and by the most interesting method yet invented. However, continuous casting for a lengthened period against or across a heavy down-stream wind is too arduous an exercise to remain pleasant, and therefore a halt was made beside a likely pool, fringed with saughs, at the head of which a strong stream entered.

Our rest was not destined to be a long one, for very soon one or two March Browns appeared driven down the wind, to be followed presently by a considerable shower of them, and not one of them escaped to carry on the race. Both the pool and stream boiled with rising fish, some of them excellent specimens, and we thought it remarkable that trout could thus early in the season withstand the strong rush of water.

As every angler knows, the March Brown is a large fly, to which the artificial seems to bear some slight superficial resemblance in colour, but when one

considers the relative sizes of the real insect and the counterfeit one wonders why a well-educated trout ever forgets itself so far as to accept the latter. Fortunately the fact remains that the feathered imitation is taken, and on the day under review there was no exception to the rule.

As soon as the first fly made its appearance, a hackled pattern was oiled and attached to the cast. A suitable victim had then to be selected, and one was found at the tail of the stream. Let it be understood that the water was very low and clear, that all sorts and conditions of trout were indulging in the feast, so that a great deal depended on confining our efforts to what appeared to be the best fish within our range of vision. On such a breezy day the number of flies blown on to any given pool is not likely to be large, and so it behoves one to make the most of the opportunities given. Wading deeply, we sent the fly with a sharp underhand cut right into the wind, and it floated unsteadily down a few inches over the stream when the trout rose to meet it.

A firm but gentle tightening of the line sent the hook well home, and the reel screamed as the fish tore off at speed in an endeavour to reach the safety of the tangled roots of the willows on the opposite bank, but, luck attending our efforts, it was persuaded to turn before reaching the danger zone, and the battle was fought to a finish in the deepest part of the pool. When at length it was safely within the net we could again breathe freely, and repaired to the bank. The spring-balance declared it to weigh 1 lb. 4 oz., a perfect specimen of the true Clyde native, conspicuous in its innumerable tiny beads

and stars, and what more beautiful trout can be found? Another shower of the flies brought two more fish to the creel, certainly not to be compared with the first, and yet worthy of a place beside it.

We now moved upstream to the next pool, a really delightful spot when fish are in taking humour. It is a long pool, the tail of it smooth and shallow, a "ready bit" with the big fly in the few dark hours of a June night, and there is a strong, steep stream flowing in at the neck. The left bank is a lofty scaur with deep water close into the side, and although the right bank is also high there is easy wading in shallow water on fine small gravel. Everything is therefore in the angler's favour so far as surroundings are concerned, and when an easterly breeze and a hatch of flies occur simultaneously there is no pool in all the miles of Clyde which will yield a more abundant harvest. We have good reason to consider it a place which never fails, and on one particular day in May, when the little Iron Blue was occasionally in evidence, we took from it fully 10 lb. of fine trout, but on this occasion the conditions were such that no success whatever could be reasonably expected.

No fish were showing, as no succulent March Brown arrived to tempt them upwards; the downstream gale, our pet aversion, still persisted, and the laborious work entailed in "fishing the stream" right up the whole length of the pool not appealing to us, we contented ourselves with a cast or two into the shallow quiet corner at that deadly part where the main current enters. For the occasion the March Brown was replaced by a Greenwell's Glory, possibly the most generally useful fly

in the multitude of feathered inventions, and at the second or third cast a good trout rose and was hooked. At once it bolted into deep water, tearing off line at a rapid rate, making it difficult to keep in touch with it, but the pace was too hot to last, and within a minute it was lying exhausted on the surface of the water. Though slightly smaller it was really a more magnificent specimen than the first, exhibiting all the comeliness of symmetrical development.

The short day was over all too soon, and it was not in any sense what would be termed a good fishing day, even taking into consideration the fact that the basket contained at its close two trout of which any Clyde angler might feel at any time justifiably proud. It affords yet another proof that the Clyde is a glorious river. In it, moreover, the privilege of fishing is not confined to a favoured few, but is absolutely free to all comers. The rods that are waved across its streams and flats in a season must be numbered by the thousand, and yet the sport obtainable is often really excellent and at times unexcelled.

CHAPTER IX

MAY DAY ON LOCH LEVEN

THE ancient burgh of Kinross is flooded with moonlight, the sky is innocent of cloud save for some dark masses round the northern horizon, the grass is slowly being powdered white under the chill air, the narrow streets ring clearly to our tread, and the thoughts that are uppermost in our minds are all of the prospects for the morrow.

No sudden improvement has occurred in the atmospheric conditions, and we wander leisurely down to the pier and view the loch lying unruffled under a blazing sun. A host of anglers are gathered together there, most of them eager to catch their first trout of the season, and the rest quite as anxious to add to the number of their victims collected both here and in other lochs and streams from Loch Ness to the Solway. The prospect is hopeless in the extreme, but anglers are notoriously hopeful men, ever looking forward even after numerous disappointments to the great days that will come.

"Fly only" is not the order of the day, and, though all greatly prefer to cast the seductive fly, in conditions such as these they prepare to give the spinning lure an opportunity of saving them

from the ignominy of an empty creel. The spare rods carried in case some accident should befall the favourite cherished implements are hastily mounted, and hurried visits are paid to the Shanty and the Office, and there we see exchanged for coin of the realm phantoms of varied hue, Devons gold and silver, minnows of horn, quill, and daintily coloured celluloid, confections of peacock's feathers, but the favourite selection is an anæmic Ghost. Truly the waters will be well raked to-day, and the boatmen will row miles and miles, lures will be changed from time to time in a desperate endeavour to keep away the stigma which attaches to that unwelcome condition which in anglers' parlance is usually designated "clean," an awful adjective which no fisher desires ever to be applicable to him.

At length we board the boats and set a course for the Sluices, chosen perhaps because it affords an opportunity for refraining from touching or interfering with the minnow for a long time, or because most of the fish taken this season have been got in that neighbourhood, or again the selection may be simply due to the fact that whatever is far away is the most desirable. The flotilla of sixteen boats makes quite an imposing spectacle as they proceed wedge-fashion just like the flock of Canadian geese flying overhead. We will not elaborate further on the circumstance.

The leading boats appear to the slow-moving craft in the rear like floating islands, so calm is the surface. About a mile out the boat immediately in front of us suddenly stops, oars are shipped, and the music of a screaming reel reaches all around, filling hearts again with hope. The lucky man in the stern rises to his

feet, and, with rod meantime curving gracefully, continues to regale us with the music. Presently a net dips in the water, a flash of white gleams through the meshes, and a cheer signalises the great event. The boatmen bend to their toil again, and the minnows spin more cheerily than before.

A faint breath of wind comes out of the north-east and we wind up our unprofitable spinners off the western point of St. Serf. In the calm belts one or two fish are seen rising, but not with serious intent, for one sample of diminutive midge seems sufficient to satisfy the appetite of each, and the rise is not repeated. Not only so, but, whenever the boat approaches, even that restricted amount of rising ceases altogether. In the slight ripple we manage to come within casting distance of one or two, but, though we lay a dry-fly precisely in the centre of the ring, we find ourselves absolutely beaten in our efforts to tempt a fish to accept it, and we ask ourselves the reason why.

Certainly we cannot hope to imitate even to our satisfaction the insignificant black and green midges, one or two only of the thousands of which have the power to bring up a trout. A badger hackle wound on a small hook, it occurs to us, might prove serviceable, and we decide to be so prepared against any possible repetition of these tactics. It is a most valuable pattern on a river when trout are "smutting," or "cursing" as it has been put, but never before have we found any necessity for it on a loch. As our floater sits, with its wings cocked upright, a fine trout rises within six inches of it, and, though we carefully refrain from giving the line the faintest twitch, the fish pays not the slightest attention to

it. A few minutes later another trout treats us in the same manner. It is a new experience for us to have our well-trying patterns so persistently ignored. We are defeated, and, admitting it, give up the unequal fight after two hours, and replace the cast by one bearing the customary four wet-flies.

On the edge of the ripple a few dozen yards away we become aware of trout rising freely, and rowing quietly over we are soon within reach. We are tempted again to try the dry-fly, for these fish are feeding greedily on a somewhat larger variety of Blae and Black which has appeared, but the desire to make the most of our opportunities and to save all time possible is too great to be denied. We are justified in our decision, for in the minimum of time we hook, play, and land three trout, and find that the rise is past.

One or two clouds now appear, and the sun is actually obscured now and then for short periods; the breeze is surely increasing slightly in strength, and we discover another shoal of rising fish. Pursuing the same tactics as before, viz., careful casting over the rise and working with the greatest assiduity when the sun's light is dimmed, we have some really pretty sport, and very soon eleven trout are safely in the boat. They are all fine young trout, averaging little more than half a pound, a small lot undoubtedly for Loch Leven, but all the better on that account. They are in the very height of condition, game to the end of the fight, very different indeed from their longer and heavier brethren, which are still in miserable order. The amount of sport enjoyed is not to be measured by the number taken, for, as usually happens, not

all that are hooked come safely to the net. After lasting not more than an hour our good time is at an end, as well we know after several years' experience of the loch.

Presently a strong breeze springs up from the east, rapidly freshening to a gale, the sky is swept clear of clouds, an ugly glitter spreads over the water, the death-warrant of the Loch Leven angler's hopes. No more fish will be taken on the fly to-day, though we try our utmost, but the result of our labours is known without any necessity on our part to state it. The gale increases in force, the cold is intense, and we gladly run for the pier. On the homeward journey the boats fly before the gale, and it is only with the greatest difficulty that their pace is checked at the pier, where a little carelessness in manipulation might readily have resulted in disaster. The day is done. Loch Leven has in some respects lived up to its reputation, and in others it has not. It has yielded no sport in sunlight, but on the other hand it has not fished well in an east wind, and we also find that it has not been kind to the beginners.

Baskets are now compared, and the most remarkable fact noticed is that the trout caught with fly, though inferior in weight to those taken on the minnow, are immeasurably superior in condition. That will not be invariably the case, but on this day only the smaller class of fish were rising to the surface. We learned one or two things that may be useful to others—e.g., the most killing minnow had proved to be the Gold Devon, and it seems to be generally agreed by those who have considerable experience in trolling that on a bright sunny day that lure will usually prove to be the most deadly.

As to flies, the most effective patterns were the Woodcock and Yellow, Blae and Black, and the Butcher as always also found a few victims.

Loch Leven, no matter how many complaints we make against it, still exercises the old fascination, and we return again and again, always anxious to renew our acquaintance with it. A single hour with the trout rising freely all around means glorious sport; the fish are there, and when they are in taking humour they are easy to lure. The condition of the class of trout we usually associate with the loch is not yet satisfactory, and it should be possible to improve it, but meantime we must content ourselves apparently and live in hope that better days are in store.

CHAPTER X

ON A RESERVOIR

THERE must be an astonishing number of trout-stocked reservoirs throughout Renfrewshire. We are always discovering another one, and each in its turn seems to be superior to all those whose acquaintance we have already made. So far as we can learn there are few barren sheets of water in the county ; in fact, nowhere do we find so much effort made to provide angling facilities. We lately paid our first visit to one of these, perhaps the smallest of them all, but certainly not the least attractive.

A more unpromising day we have seldom seen ; we shall have to be content with little, and may yet be glad if we succeed in securing a solitary specimen ; we have not perfect freedom of choice of day, and therefore we must try to content ourselves with whatever fortune may chance to grant. In the shade the grass is white with frost, the sun shines brightly but with little warmth in a cloudless sky, and not a breath of wind stirs the waters. Almost as soon as we arrive, however, a faint breeze springs up, raising a tiny ripple, but leaving a broad, calm belt along the windward shore. Hopefulness consequently drives away incipient despair.

We might repair to the lee-side, a deadly part that we thoroughly enjoy searching for an hour or two, but it will be as well to wait awhile in order that the day may have time to declare itself. We rest on an out-cropping rock, studying the configuration of the shores, endeavouring to estimate the relative productiveness of the many bays and points, until we reach the conclusion that the south bank is likely to prove the happiest hunting ground.

The wind is gradually increasing in strength and we walk round to our chosen stretch, leaving behind all apparatus except the net and mounted rod. We find that the breeze suits moderately well as it blows with but a slight inclination towards the shore, offering only a negligible inconvenience in the manipulation of the rod.

Out across the waves the flies are sent, and almost immediately, before we have settled down in earnest to fish, a trout flashes into sight, but the strike is late. It is a good fish, worthy of another trial later in the day, and therefore we kick up the turf at the stance as a mark wherewith to assist memory. We vary a great deal the method of fishing out the cast, but not its direction which is invariably at right angles to the shore. Sometimes the flies are allowed an appreciable interval in which to sink, and then with rod-point low to the surface they are brought towards us. Again we deliver them as before, but as soon as they alight we hold the rod high and allow the wind to work upon the line and nurse the lures shorewards. Between these two extremes we indulge in many variations both in the working of the rod and the treatment of the flies, but we do not take long to discover that the

trout have a marked preference for a well-sunk lure subjected to a slow, steady movement. That we would consider unfortunate on some occasions and in some places, but so intensely clear is the water that every offering fish is plainly discernible. Also we soon acquire the knowledge that the feeding trout are lying within a few yards of the shore, so that long-casting requiring effort in the breeze is rendered totally unnecessary. We are, however, progressing rather quickly.

Encouraged by the first rise in an unfamiliar water, we cast with greater care and diligence, and in due course have the satisfaction of feeling that the hook is fast in a good fish. Not knowing exactly what to expect, we proceed to treat it with a certain respect. It is somewhat lively, but a leap in air betrays it to be only a half-pounder at most, and we cease exercising the excessive caution. As we remove the hook we find that the trout demands closer inspection, for its beauty is conspicuous; it is a nicely shaped specimen, with golden flanks plentifully starred with brightest red. In rapid succession two more come along to keep it company, quite as handsome as the first, but a trifle smaller.

We should explain that to-day we have accompanying us one who has a love for the country places, and is trembling on the verge, hesitating as to whether he should become an angler. Apparently of the opinion that sport is so satisfactory on this shore that we are not likely to leave it in search of another, he takes upon himself the task of bringing round the lunch-basket and remainder of the apparatus left behind on the west bank. By the time he arrives again we are able to announce that

we have captured two more trout, one of which still reposes in the net beside us, while the other is lying on the bank beside the three first victims. He expresses a desire to see them, and we proceed in search. The three trout are lying in an orderly heap as we left them, but the fourth has mysteriously disappeared. We look about, but in vain.

Here is a fine predicament. We know we captured the fish and laid it beside the others, but we cannot produce the evidence. We know, also, what some people say and think about anglers and their proneness to exaggeration; their reputation for veracity is none too good. As we wander around, sometimes at a ridiculous distance from the heap, searching for a fish with greater diligence than ever we fished for one, we are tortured by the silent individual watching our every movement, and no doubt sadly shaking his head from time to time.

And at last we see the trout. It is in the water, in about three inches, but we see with alarm that it is right side up and that the fins are in tremulous motion. With a sweep of the net we scoop out the fish, put our mind to rest, and congratulate ourselves for being able to think of the net at such a critical time. Of course we must have failed to dispatch the trout at the first attempt, with the result that it had flopped about until it found itself in its native element. It thoroughly deserved its liberty, and that we might have granted had there been no spectator looking doubtfully upon us. Every angler will appreciate the difficulty as well as the humour of the situation and feel relieved even as we were that the mystery was so fortunately solved. But was it? In the mind of the budding fisherman

there must have lurked a suspicion that that trout was not ours at all, but was placed there by some lucky coincidence that we might thereby save our reputation, and that he had been introduced to a method of catching trout not mentioned in angling literature, for we beheld him later in the day prowling about the banks with net in hand and a hungry look on his face.

For some time clouds have been crowding the sky until now not a speck of blue is visible ; the air is decidedly cold, the wind freshens to a gale, snow begins to fall. The gale develops to a blizzard which forces us to suspend operations and seek shelter under a projecting crag. The snow, however, defies all our attempts at escape, finding its way everywhere, and we are thankful when we find the light becoming stronger, the wind less fierce. The storm has spent itself, and before the flakes have ceased we are casting again, catching trout in fact. As a rule the fish are taking a firm hold so that we lose none in the running, but, whenever one rises and escapes the hook, it steadfastly refuses to give us another opportunity. Not a fly is on the water, the surface of which remains all day undisturbed by the mark that calls for the studied cast. The trout, however, are evidently inclined to feed, and though the rises far outnumber the acceptances the score mounts steadily.

The whole affair looks absurdly easy to the patient spectator, and guessing his thoughts we offer him the rod. His initial efforts are characterised by an excess of energy, a fault that is quickly eradicated, but the art of sending the flies straight across the breeze is not so readily acquired. The cast is borne

away down the wind, falling within a yard of the shore, and, wonderful to relate, there is an unmistakable rise. Not knowing when or how to strike, the ardent beginner loses the chance, but, accepting advice, repeats the cast. The trout rises again, and is again missed. A third time it gives him his opportunity, but is not taken. Yet again the cast is made : the fish, determined to die, throws itself upon the fly, and makes certain of its prey. For some time it plays the angler, but after a long interval we lift out with the net this trout of suicidal tendencies, a veritable half-pounder.

Not once throughout the day have we succeeded in raising a trout a second time, and a wizard of a beginner can raise a fish as often as he likes and hook it whenever he begins to weary of playing with it. We expect that the act of striking either hooks or effectively scares the trout ; it might be better not to strike at all, and instead allow a fish to have a little amusement first, give it time to make up its mind, to decide whether it really wants the fly. For our own part we shall continue to strike as soon as we receive the invitation.

Now we return to the mark on the turf which indicates the point, casting from which we raised the first trout seen in the little reservoir. Now it is a much more difficult cast to negotiate owing to the greater strength and less favourable direction of the wind, but the performance is so far good that a fish is raised and hooked. It is the best fish we have seen all day, and it behaves in rather a disconcerting fashion, spinning like a torpedo, fighting valiantly. The reason for its acrobatic display is made apparent when we prepare to extract the hook, which is

deeply embedded at the root of one of the pectoral fins, so securely fixed indeed that its removal calls for an operation with the knife.

Now this success gives us a feeling of intense satisfaction, from which we are aroused by the question: "How do you know that is the trout you raised before?" Of course we do not know, and we do not care. We know that at nearly every mark along the edge we either miss or hook a fish. Perhaps we exercise more care at such places, but the main point is that we get every encouragement to indulge in the practice, and, whether we receive attention from the same fish as before or from another, we need not consider.

Off a projecting point, where is a merry turmoil of wave, we elect to make our final efforts. These are the most lucrative of all, bringing in the minimum of time three excellent trout, which seize the tail-fly in no half-hearted fashion the moment it alights upon the water. The air becomes bitterly cold, another storm of wind and snow comes to drive us from the tiny but prolific reservoir, not before, however, it has yielded us a basket of thirteen trout, as pretty as angler could wish to see, taken, moreover, on a first visit and on a day when none would have expected much success.

CHAPTER XI

ON LOCH TAY

(I) *Out from Killin*

THE title might lead one to expect an account of a day's trolling and a description of thrilling fights with the lordly salmon, but our quarry on this expedition was the more humble trout of the famous loch. The occasion was our first visit to these prolific waters, of which we had received so favourable reports that we were the more anxious to make its acquaintance, and of course the interest which of necessity always attaches to new and unknown waters supplied another reason why we should make every effort to accept the opportunity which presented itself.

Through the good offices of a brother angler, recognised universally as a skilful exponent of the gentle art, a boat and man were, without trouble to us, obtained, and we embarked at the stage on the River Lochay. The weather was not such as promised much sport in the shape of a well-filled creel, for the wind was from the east, fluky and unsteady, at times threatening to fade away altogether, while the sky held few clouds, conditions which do not fill with hope the heart of the angler who sets out for a day on Loch Tay. A brisk breeze from the west with an occasional shower of rain is,

we understand, a more hopeful condition, but we did not worry over these matters.

We are anglers, and always hope for the best, but it was our misfortune that day to be accompanied by the most doleful pessimist of a boatman it has been our lot to meet. Once we were imprisoned for a day on Loch Leven with a pair of pessimists, who apparently recognised misery as the supreme happiness, but our encounters with such unpleasant aids to fishing have luckily numbered few. This Loch Tay specimen was amusing in his own way, and entertained us on the long row down the river and across the preserved part of the loch with the great records of the past, but took care to finish each exciting tale with the caution that absolutely nothing whatever in the way of sport had ever been forthcoming with such a wind and sky as our ill fortune had granted us. Happily there was another pair of oars in the boat, and these when brought into use had a double effect, viz., the sadness of the prospects received a considerable rest, and the boat rapidly drew nearer to the fishing ground.

Arrived there, as the wind was too light and variable to drift the boat, the growling ghillie was instructed to row slowly ahead along the southern shore, while we cast our flies under the trees and bushes which in places overhang the water, or to the very edge of the rocks, or into that fateful spot between the shallow and the deep. At length, after we had almost persuaded ourselves that the boatman's predictions were going to prove only too true, we hooked our first Loch Tay trout, and could not refrain from expressing our surprise and admiration of the marvellous fighting power exhibited

by the nimble quarter-pounder. After being hooked it seemed to prefer the air to the water, but we cannot allow a trout of this size to have too much say in the game, and we dragged it struggling all the time to the waiting net. The ghillie thereupon had another attack of his trouble, bewailing the weather and declaring that under such conditions only such trash could ever be taken, and during the day at least twenty times was the same declaration repeated.

A long shelf of rock with deep gloomy water beneath it next appeared and seemed to us a place likely to hold a good fish. As soon as the tail-fly touched the water it was seized and a heavier trout, assisted by the way on the boat, made things merry for a time. It displayed the same strength and agility as our first victim, but the hook retaining its hold we soon laid it to rest in the creel. It weighed more than half a pound, and was in magnificent condition.

Just at this point a salmon rose within casting distance, and of course we laid our flies across the boil, not with any expectation of eliciting any response from the salmon, but the boatman rose well, declaring that not once in a hundred years would a Loch Tay salmon condescend to take a trout-fly. Evidently the appointed time had not arrived, and we turned our eyes to the shore again.

Shortly after we secured yet another but smaller trout. Our own opinion was that we were having quite a satisfactory time, but there was another in the boat whose ideas were quite the reverse, and his inclinations led him to suggest that we should now cross over to the north shore, as there we would probably find more wind and a better fishing ripple. Though quite contented with the measure

of success granted to us, we acquiesced, for we are aware that it is bad policy to go against the wishes of a ghillie, and, moreover, we are never averse to changing our ground if by so doing there is any likelihood of improved sport. Undoubtedly both angler and boatman work more energetically after such a change, and such additional exertions very often bear some fruit.

We did find a slight breeze, before which the boat drifted at a gentle pace, so that we were enabled to cast our flies all around and to subject them to many and various movements. A trout was seen to rise astern and close inshore, and we covered it at once, but it was not until the third cast that it accepted the tail-fly as, well sunk, it swung slowly past it. One or two more rises to the natural fly were perceived, too far off to be of immediate value, and altogether there were more signs of life on this shore. Every now and then a trout would cheer us up by rising to our flies, but almost without exception they failed even to touch them, so that our spirits drooped again. Apparently they came up to inspect and nothing more; they were displaying "attention without intention," as we think we have seen it somewhere expressed, though perhaps the phrase was used regarding men rather than trout. Any that did touch were hooked, but they were usually small fry, and the boatman became doleful again, longing wearily for the true Loch Tay type to waken up and take an interest in the proceedings.

At length on rounding a point he waxed quite enthusiastic, declaring this to be the greatest bay in the loch for trout and making us envious with

his eloquent tales of great baskets of weighty fish. Unfortunately the breeze scarcely ruffled the surface, and we drifted very slowly across the bay without even a rise to relieve the monotony, until nearly at the extreme point there was a fine swirl on the surface, and as the strike was administered an agreeable feeling of resistance informed us that at last we had hooked one of the true brand. It took a glorious rush outwards, tearing line off the reel at a rapid rate, and marked the completion of its race by a great leap into the air, confirming us in the belief that it was the best fish of the day. In a few minutes a gallant pounder lay safely in the boat, and we experienced a deep feeling of satisfaction, while the boatman became quite cheerful—comparatively, that is—and exhorted us to work hard and cast diligently, for we were approaching the mouth of a burn off which good trout were often met. We required little encouragement, and a few smaller specimens were duly secured.

The score was slowly but steadily mounting up, but the fish proved dour to the end; the expected rise did not materialise, and, though somewhat unwilling to cease operations, we decided to begin the long row home. First, however, the fish were laid out on the floor of the boat, twenty-one of them all told, weighing $7\frac{1}{2}$ lb., and the boatman became jubilant, perhaps because he now had the craft's stem pointing homewards, but also undoubtedly because, being so much engrossed with his tales of other days, he had failed to observe how frequently fish were coming aboard.

Still true to his tale, he declared it a great

catch for such a bad day, and expressed his fervent desire that we would return on a really good day when a moist west wind would be raising a fair wave and the big trout would be in taking humour. Then, he affirmed, the boat would contain forty or fifty fish weighing over 20 lb., and we would have a day of great sport.

We are going again, not expecting quite so much, but prepared to be satisfied with very much less, for Loch Tay is a delightful sheet of water on which any angler would be almost certain to have some reward for his labours. The same boatman would do admirably again, for he was, and probably usually is, entertaining to a degree, so that even though sport was awanting we would be certain to have an interesting time.

We cannot give any advice as to suitable lures for Loch Tay, or deduce any conclusions after so small an experience. We used a cast of standard Loch Leven flies, Peter Ross, Woodcock and Yellow, Blae and Black, Butcher, and we do not think that any other combination would have produced superior results. Every one of the quartette did its fair share of work, the trout showing no decided preference for any one pattern, which of course is the usual experience during any day on which the weather conditions are unfavourable.

On the homeward journey, especially on reaching the mouths of the Dochart and the Lochay, parts which are preserved, we were sorely tempted to cast our flies upon the waters, not that any trout were showing but solely because the water looked so well and seemed likely to hold a large head of fish. The breeze here, too, was stronger and more steady,

raising quite a promising ripple. Under the bushes that line the banks of the Lochay we have no doubt that great fish lie waiting for all sorts of flies and grubs that may be wafted to them, and it may yet be our good fortune to lay a floating fly there for them to inspect and possibly also accept. We are sure that a trout of Loch Tay weighing from 1 lb. to 2 lb. in weight—and we are assured that there are many such—will afford a most thrilling bit of sport ; we hope to pay many a return visit, and learn to know more intimately the loch and its lively, hard-fighting, well-conditioned inhabitants.

(2) *Off Ardeonaig.*

Ardeonaig is also a very suitable centre from which to fish Loch Tay, as lying quite at hand are fine curving bays of good reputation, while it is not a long voyage across to the northern shore, where there are broad, sandy shallows and rock-studded reaches, all capable of affording excellent sport when the trout they contain are intent upon surface food.

The wind was light and fluky from the west as the party, three in number, boarded the boat and decided first to try a drift across Ardeonaig Bay, but this was more than the insufficient breeze found it possible to allow. We hesitated to cross to the opposite shore in search of a fair ripple, as of late gales had been so strong that many boats had had to be left miles from home and anglers laden with apparatus had been forced to suffer a weary walk. It was a windy sky, but fears were overcome and the risk taken. Possibly we should have set a course for the Gull Island, generally acknowledged

to be the most troutful part of the whole loch, but we did not, and so obtained an excuse for an expedition some other time.

Instead we struck a bay, broad and of ideal fishing depth, lined with beautiful golden sand, and hope ruled high that here if anywhere we would lure a bright, lively trout. We did not. At times it was impossible to cast the flies at all, for preventing that were great belts of floating rubbish, sticks, straws, twigs, and even bushes, brought down into the loch by innumerable streams which had been in flood for weeks in succession. The man in the bow, brought up on the shores, had difficulty in recognising the loch and in picking out his accustomed marks; they were hidden beneath the wave. We looked towards Killin to behold it drenched in rain, and we prepared to meet the coming storm. It did not come. The clouds split, one half travelling along to soak the heights above Loch Earn, the other half to swell the Lyon, while we in the centre felt thankful and dry. Pleased at our escape, we turned our backs to the wind again and plied the rods with hope and vigour. At length the bow-rod spoke, and the remaining two ceased operations until the victim, a nice little trout of half a pound, was safely aboard. This event marked the end of the monotony, and with regularity, though not with very satisfactory frequency, fish were raised, run, and duly netted.

We have fished in many waters and in company with very many anglers, but never in all our experience have we encountered a fisher possessing a keenness in the slightest degree comparable to that displayed by our new-found friend of Tayside.

Young and full of vigour, rejoicing in his strength, his chief aim and object that day was the killing of trout, and he was not at all particular as to which rod should do it; he was always on the move, casting incessantly or, when one stretch was proving unproductive, dislodging the legitimate boatman and driving the stout craft at tremendous speed to the scene chosen for his next efforts. We rejoiced to see his earnestness, and venture to predict that he will yet be known as a mighty slayer of fish. Like most strong young anglers, he had one grievous fault—viz., he cast a line far longer than he could fish—but that is characteristic of every one at some period of his career, and some soon overcome the tendency.

The boatman, an amateur who performed his duties like a professional, was one we enjoyed being beside. One of his remarks deserves to be recorded—"This bay, gentlemen, is the best in the whole loch; if you don't get fish here—I'll take you to another." We did get a fish there, a perfect beauty.

At this point the wind veered round into the south-west, freshening the while, and, blowing as it did directly on shore, it made drifting impossible and fishing uncomfortable. We beached the boat, lunched, selected a cast of larger flies, and went afloat again. Rounding a small headland we found a bay for part at least of which the breeze was suitable. The change of lure proved beneficial, or possibly the trout had wakened up a little, but, whatever the cause, better sport was forthcoming. However, it was not good enough for the man of action, who seized the oars and lifted the boat across the loch to the Copper Mines, from which

point we proceeded to drift towards Ardtalnaig. Here the trout did remarkably well in the short time at our disposal, and a few specimens of really excellent quality were secured. A rise was seen close to a submerged rock inshore, line was lengthened, and the tail fly laid with precision on the boil. The trout seized it as it fell, tore off ten yards of line, leaped, writhed, and struggled in vain, and soon the net enclosed a truly handsome fish fully a pound in weight. The gale became so strong that we had actually determined to forsake the boat and trudge to Ardeonaig when with phenomenal suddenness it dropped to a gentle breeze, and instead we trailed a minnow behind us, without, however, eliciting the faintest response.

It is noteworthy that we obtained most sport and the best fish off the southern shore, where too we spent a relatively small part of the day, whereas the Lawers side is commonly agreed to contain the better fishing grounds. The prevalent opinion is probably correct, and our experience leads us again to a conclusion that we have often made before—viz., that if the angler's sole or chief aim when fishing a large loch is to get a good basket of trout he should select a stretch of repute and there wait, not without casting of course, until the fish become inclined to feed. Such a course may appear dreary and monotonous, as no doubt it is, and we seldom are in a mood to practise it ourselves, but for the purpose indicated it is, we are convinced, sound advice. On Loch Leven, where every man's desire is to catch fish more than to fish, the recognised key to success is—remain in that place where you have seen or killed trout. Very often there one will see

a boat going over the same ground again and again, and everyone makes the same deductions from the procedure.

Results are invariably expected by some; to others they are immaterial. They were much better than might have been expected under the conditions prevailing, and really poor for such a fine sheet of water. The basket consisted of seventeen trout, which were left behind at Ardeonaig. We regret our inability to record the aggregate weight, but on the morrow they breakfasted fourteen people, who expressed no complaint regarding their repast. What surprised us most in the matter was the discovery that there were so many people in the village.

Not yet content to leave the trout of Loch Tay unmolested, we paid it still another visit, but in the evening. On this occasion we were privileged to fish the preserved water at the head of the loch from nine o'clock until midnight. How comes it that the prospect of evening fishing fills the angler with a spirit of hopefulness? Often he is doomed to disappointment, and still the "evening rise" casts its spell over him. Certainly there is sometimes exhibited by the trout an unwariness, a levity we might almost say, when the long shadows fade away; but it is only sometimes, and these times and our opportunities seldom coincide. Still they have in the past occurred simultaneously, and their memory is sweet, so that we shall gladly go again and again, probably usually to fail but perhaps once to succeed. The possibility is ever present, so we take the bad with the good, remembering throughout the winters the one and forgetting the many.

Therefore out we went, sanguine as ever, to explore

the broad shallows around the island near the river mouth ; but though the night was calm and mild, and apparently most favourable, the expedition was a lamentable failure so far as results were concerned. It was a pleasure to be afloat on the unruffled water in these eerie hours ; a full moon waded in a sea of cloud—there was wind aloft ; ghost-like swans glided placidly about ; the music of the burns was clearly heard, while we were absolutely lost in a trackless waste and felt thankful for the boatman's presence and knowledge.

We secured only one trout, a good specimen enough, and that was taken in the gloaming, but when night fell we had an experience, novel for us, in that we captured no fewer than five char. Never before have we caught more than one of these fish in the course of a day's angling, and only in Loch Lubnaig have we until now been favoured. We are informed that at times in Loch Tay large numbers are killed on the fly late in the evenings of June and July. They afford some sport, being fairly lively on the hook ; still they do not, of course, show a fighting power equal to that provided by a trout of similar size. They usually frequent deep water, take best in a calm, and prefer the fly well sunk.

Loch Tay, as is known to everyone, is justly famed for the excellence of the salmon fishing it affords in early spring, and in addition, we are convinced, though perhaps without sufficient cause, that it is entitled to rank as a first-class trouting water, on which anyone should always welcome an opportunity for spending a day.

CHAPTER XII

ON THE RIVER

NO matter how many opportunities we may have for expeditions to lochs, we always do our utmost to obtain a day on the river just before the stone-fly makes its annual appearance, and so satisfies the trout that for a short time at least thereafter they are considerably less dependent on the comparatively diminutive duns.

The river at any season is interesting, but towards the end of May, when the hawthorn is laden with its covering of fragrant snow and the beech hedges in the country lanes are tenderly green, we find its attractions beyond description. The trout, too, revel in this season of life, and have been making good the winter's wastage, laying up a store of strength by feasting on showers of duns and hosts of nymphs in preparation for the strenuous times ahead when they will repair to the very strongest streams, there to accord a hearty welcome to every transformed creeper that ventures within their reach. At other periods a thundery atmosphere, a breathless day of undimmed sunshine, a low temperature reminiscent of winter may drive us utterly discomfited from the river's banks, but at this hopeful season a day with

at least one favourable interval of long or short duration is almost a certainty.

Something most unusual would necessarily be experienced were we not to see a fleet of Olives, a few Iron Blues, or failing these a cloud of sand-flies. Wherever a stretch of sand lines the river, there are the latter waiting the call of the sun to tempt them forth, whereas if the wind is chill the little Iron Blue, hardy as ever, will be present to rouse the trout into activity. These are both great favourites, and preferring as they do opposite extremes of temperature, one or other is sure to be in evidence, and the presence of either signifies that the angler's labours will not be without reward.

However, the river has developed to a high degree the power of making us revise our conclusions and of showing us the utter foolishness of daring to make generalisations regarding it and its inhabitants, for on the day of which we speak we saw neither of these two insects which we are wont to regard as characteristic of the season. The day was apparently not cold enough for the one nor warm enough for the other, a strong breeze from the east being accompanied by blazing sunshine.

As a result—or, it were safer to say, as a matter of fact—there was no decided hatch of any particular type of fly, but from time to time a few specimens representing nearly as many different species would float past our point of observation. Nor was their voyage long; spreading rings moving onwards would mark their disappearance for ever. Evidently the fish were inclined to feed if only food were available, so that our decision to use the floating fly seemed justified, for apart from the facts

noted we had learned from numerous passing fishers that the creeper—often, nay usually, a deadly lure now—was being persistently ignored. Having no definite guide to lead us, the choice of a suitable fly presented a problem difficult of solution, and still doubtful we decided to use the ever-ready Greenwell's Glory, valuable because it resembles more or less faithfully several varieties of ephemeridæ.

We commenced operations on a broad gravelly stream, to which fish from the quieter, deeper waters of the pool below are wont to resort when desiring to feed, and from which on several well-remembered days in past years we have taken many a beautiful specimen trout, and also the less heartily welcomed grayling. After casting for a few minutes, fruitless if we ignore one or two splashing short rises from immature individuals, we had the satisfaction to see a broad golden flank exposed momentarily as our fly lightly touched the stream. A sharp, decided movement sent home the eager hook and the reel screamed as the fish tore across to the deeper water at the far bank, there to indulge in wild surface tactics, which though as a rule somewhat disconcerting to the angler showed us that we had been deceived as to the size of our capture. In a few moments the rod took command and a graceful half-pounder presently slipped into the net. A modest but withal quite a satisfactory and promising beginning was thus made, and we hopefully continued to search the stream. The total was not increased.

The river, owing to recent rains, was running full, though clear, which was unfortunate, because it prevented us reaching easily our favourite corners.



ON THE RIVER IN MAY.

Not only so, but crossing was found to be impossible, so that it was extremely difficult frequently to get into a satisfactory position. As it happened, the bank we had first chosen is not suited to the majority of the pools in this stretch, a fact we well know, but we had miscalculated the volume of water in the river. A walk of over a mile was necessitated before we could reach a ford that could be negotiated, but, that accomplished, our hopes revived afresh, and at last we reached the pool, with memories of which we have whiled away many a long winter evening. We took up our station about midway down the flat, laid the creel and other impedimenta on the bank, and burdened with but the rod and landing-net we proceeded to business, confident that, whatever stretch of water might fail, this favourite would never.

A description of it and the method of conducting the campaign seems advisable. Its available fishing length will total not more than fifty yards, and one bank, the deep side, and that from which we fish, is here and there planted with clumps of saughs. A considerable current flows down the centre, and the water is too deep for wading except for a step out from the edge. This step, however, is invaluable and renders possible a very close approach to a feeding fish. Cautiously up the edge we slowly make our way, casting the flies directly upstream, then at an angle of forty-five degrees, and finally straight across the current. The flies are allowed to float for only a yard before being carefully lifted off and replaced on the surface once more.

All casting is done underhand, so that the fly as a general rule floats naturally and as desired with wings

upright, and a second reason for adopting this method lies in the fact that in this style of delivering a fly the rod is not allowed to pass farther upstream than the angler. The great advantage of this is that the flash of the rod does not betray the enemy's presence to these exceedingly shy and wary fish. Also, a short line may be and should be used if the angler desires to hook the majority of the trout he succeeds in raising. Stewart, the author of *The Practical Angler*, in many respects the most complete and comprehensive book on trout-fishing ever written, wrote one exceptionally valuable sentence, viz.—“We advise the angler who is using a long line and raising but not hooking a number of trout to shorten his line, and he will be at once struck with the difference.” This is especially true when one is using a floating fly and casting up on a quick-flowing stream or glide. We often find ourselves using the length of line with which we feel most comfortable, and then on the first rise missed the sentence quoted above flashes across our memory and, regretting the lapse, we make the necessary adjustment, with the consequence that the next offer is almost always accepted, not invariably of course, for neither we nor the trout claim to be infallible. Such is the method we have found to produce the best results in such a piece of water as has been under consideration.

Every now and then the Greenwell's Glory claimed a victim, which after being unhooked was tossed on the bank or carefully returned to the water, and by the time the strong rush at the neck of the pool was reached quite a number had to be picked up on our return journey to the creel.

There we rested awhile, eyes ever on the river, and we discovered in time a small black fly in fair numbers which the trout were not allowing to pass unheeded. Such a hint must not be ignored, and somewhat reluctantly, for it had been giving a good account of itself, we removed the Greenwell and substituted for it a Black Spider. This happens to be another of our favourites, otherwise the change might not have been made. It is simply dressed, consisting of a body of black horsehair or dyed quill, and a black cock's hackle.

A preliminary cast produced a rise unexpected and unaccepted, but taking all care we laid the fly a foot above a boil which both looked and sounded as if made by a heavy fish. As it lay right in the centre of the strong current some difficulty was anticipated in avoiding the perilous drag, but all went well, and up the trout came and confidently sucked down the fly. We could imagine that we saw its look of intense surprise as the hook sank home, and we prepared for a lengthy fight with a worthy trout. In vain it sought the sanctuary which lay among the roots of the saughs, futile were its frantic rushes through the heavy stream, thwarted were all its wild attempts to take us down the river, but in due course we brought it down, and off a projecting point in deep water we steered it into the net. A truly beautiful specimen of $1\frac{1}{4}$ lb. in prime condition it proved to be, a prize indeed, sufficient reward for all our hard casting and patient waiting, but at the same time when we laid it in the creel we regretted that it should be accompanied by so many quarter-pounders.

A few more trips up the pool, interspersed of

course by necessary intervals for resting it, and varied by occasional captures, made the hours slip quickly past, and soon it was time to begin the homeward journey. The basket was agreeably heavy, wonderfully so when regard is taken of the conditions prevailing, nearly seven pounds in fact, which is mentioned merely to show what can be done with a floating fly in a single pool, provided that it is carefully treated and not unnecessarily disturbed. The great majority of anglers, we are compelled to say, cover far too much ground in the course of a day's fishing on a river, and disturb far more water than they fish, thereby rendering less remunerative the labours both of themselves and of others.

On the way downstream we tried only one part, in fact we could not pass it without having a few casts on it. Here a ditch draining to the river the flood-water from adjacent holms enters by a conduit or "cundy" as it is locally termed, and a delicate cast following a careful approach is fairly certain of reward. The Black Spider produces a dimpling rise and a fish heavy on the line tries to bolt downstream, but is prevented. A great dorsal fin cleaves the surface revealing the fish, a grayling. No time is lost in pulling it ashore, although it is a heavy specimen. So ends the day.

CHAPTER XIII

A JUNE EVENING

THERE is a little reservoir that we know well, and knowing it we delight to wander leisurely, rod in hand, round its banks casting our flies over its waters of crystal clearness. Often the reward for our long walk and diligent perseverance is nil, sometimes it is but meagre, but again occasionally, not more than once in a season, it is phenomenal, or so it seems to us, whose lot it has nearly always been to try conclusions with trout of much experience and sagacity. June is the month during which we pay it as many visits as possible, and it is in the evening that we seek it full of hope.

More often than not we leave it utterly defeated, almost persuaded to the belief that the last trout has been removed from it, but that feeling persists only for a brief period, and the following evening, as likely as not, sees us on the shores again, hastily fitting up the eager rod. What though the sun blazes in unclouded glory, though no breeze distorts the mirrored trees and rocks, though a hard, unkind wind springing up towards nightfall sweeps away the clouds of flies that obscure the water, is it not possible that our fly may by

lucky chance fall before the eyes of a hungry unsuspecting trout? No matter how many disappointments we may have, or how long deferred hopes may be, the time will surely come when all our weary waiting is forgotten and patient persistence meets with its full reward.

We have just spent a great evening on the little loch, which makes us ignore completely the six absolutely blank evenings which preceded it. They were blank only in the sense that the creel was empty, the heaviest burden for the back the fisherman knows, but it does not follow that we were miserable. Every hour we spend on or by the loch is a delight and no misery, though completeness is not attained unless at least one lusty trout has fallen to our fly.

We rejoice to roam about the banks, admittedly whiling away the time until the rise begins—and often it never begins—and the hours so spent are not wasted. There is much to amuse and interest us in the happy families of little whistling grebes paddling about in the centre of the loch, from time to time, as fancy takes them, disappearing from view and reappearing some yards away. What induces them to take these sojourns under water? Probably they are in search of food, though what it is they find to their liking we have never investigated, or possibly they swim and dive for the great joy of doing so, just as they give forth their continuing melody. The grey wagtail, the meadow-pipit, the lark, and the sandpiper all are there, and we know their nests, and follow the progress of each brood. The sandpiper is an old friend, greeting us wherever

we go, always keeping near us and yet maintaining a safe distance. He is characteristic of the water-side like the white-breasted dipper that nods to us from the water-worn boulder or the kingfisher that flashes past us in the sun.

At other times we employ ourselves discovering what it is the trout thrive so wonderfully upon, and we have found a wealth, a superabundance of food such that we can well believe is nowhere excelled. In countless numbers shrimps move in their erratic fashion here, there, and everywhere. Can it be that they at times sport with unanimity about the surface, rousing the trout to dart about in all directions pursuing them relentlessly? Again we confess we do not know, but we are inclined to think so, for we have seen signs that would point to such a conclusion. Nymphs rising to throw off their confining envelope could hardly, we think, cause such a commotion as we have witnessed. They might, but the captures we have effected during the brief but violent orgy, all showed unmistakably that they had been dining riotously on shrimps and to the exclusion of all other forms of subaqueous life. We deduce, therefore, that although these crustaceans are always present, they are at times easily procurable by the trout, while at others they are rather inactive and inconspicuous, lurking under stones or among weeds.

The bottom of the loch is here and there carpeted with a close-growing moss-like weed, and an examination of a mass of it torn out and brought to land is a revelation. Browsing on it we find snails in number, but in addition hordes of larvæ occupying tubular cases of fine sand cemented

smoothly over. These, the larvæ of the phryganidæ or sedge-flies, easily recognised by the long wings lying along the body and meeting at their inner edges to form a wedge, usually answer the call and undergo their metamorphosis to the winged state towards sundown. Their powers of flight are not remarkable, save for their weakness, and they blunder through the air, apparently without aim or object, ultimately alighting on the water, where the trout do not allow them to remain long.

The anglers of Clyde and Tweed know them or their feathered imitations well, and throughout the nights of June and July they fish the broad, shallow flats with the big "nicht flee." Favourite patterns are dressed with wings from the corn-crake, pheasant, and woodcock, which exhibit excellently the markings which distinguish the various members of the large family of sedgeflies. Some of the smaller varieties are to be seen in the daytime in full sunlight, and the shade of their wings ranges from the palest cinnamon to the deepest black. Duns are also well represented, and, when conditions are favourable, a few clouds of great spinners are sure to be seen of an evening rising and falling as is their wont. By a great stroke of good fortune, minnows are entirely absent from this water.

Owing to the presence of so much ideal food the trout, one will be prepared to hear, are of very superior quality. As a matter of fact, they are the most magnificent specimens that we have seen in all the excursions we have made in quest of the trout. Originally of Loch Leven extraction,

they have improved almost beyond recognition, being short fish of great girth, invariably in the most superb condition, yielding most exciting sport when hooked, and fighting to the last moment. Their silvery scales are brushed with a beautiful iridescence, and a brace of two-pounders lying on the grass under the final rays of the setting sun presents a picture which would make glad the heart of any angler, no matter where his wanderings had led him or how extraordinary his victories had been. It is always with a pang of real regret that we administer the final blow to these truly wonderful creatures, but we have always managed to overcome, before it is too late, any tendency to return them to the water. When prepared for the table they abundantly fulfil the promise made by their external appearance, for they cut up as red as any salmon.

The evening, the experience of which causes us to relate the tale, was such as one would expect to be conducive to sport, but we have been so often deceived by conditions that we never ask our friends to accept trout until we have arrived home. It had been a day of sunshine and great heat, tempered slightly by a gentle breeze from the east, which faded entirely away as evening drew near. The air was not in the least cold even in the shade, but there was a lack of that moist softness which we so often in vain sigh for and which brings with it the feeling that at last the trout will behave as required and greatly desired.

On arriving we spent some time surveying the loch, studying the waters, and discussing the possibilities. No flies, if we except masses of drowned midges, were

on the water; the sub-imagos warmed by the sunshine had left the surface hours before, had donned their bridal robes, and were enjoying their honeymoon in space; by and by they would complete the cycle of their varied life and float upon the water, perchance inducing a trout here and there to rise. We looked out our stock of Olive Spinners, for so we discovered them to be, and hoped that we would have an opportunity of using these 'delicately formed artificials. Time passed, but though the spinners gradually at first and then rapidly sank to rest, no cheering boil stirred the calmness of the water. Was the evening to turn out exactly as its predecessors? We thought it unlikely, for still the breeze did not come. Just as the sun was retiring behind a thick mass of cloud, a few sedges appeared, and there was a great rise as of a heavy trout in the centre of the loch. Our hopes revived again, and we waited patiently until we felt the light slightly less strong. The gloaming was upon us.

Unable to remain inactive any longer, we looked out from the damper a fairly strong cast, soaked and complete with dropper-points attached ready to take the eyed flies which we deemed worthy of trial—March Brown Spider, Woodcock and Yellow, Corncrake Sedge—all good patterns, dressed with rough bodies and on fairly large hooks. As we cast a long way out, from off a rocky point, allowing the flies to sink well before drawing them towards the shore, varying the motion now and then, we imagined we saw a gleam in the vicinity of the tail-fly. Nor was our surmise at fault, for, as we struck, we felt the hook sink

home and an agreeable heaviness on the line, accompanied by the inevitable wild rush outwards, told us that our patient waiting had been at last rewarded. The magnificent trout was duly netted, and the spring-balance agreed with our estimate of $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. It had fallen a victim to our March Brown, evidently a "shrimping" fish.

While we were deep in admiration of its beauty, we became aware of trout rising within easy distance from the bank. Sedges were now on in force, and it behoved us to fish our flies high in the water, look in the main for offers to our other two lures, and cast lightly and with the least delay over every rise within reach. We might have fished them dry, but the light was quickly going, and it was our earnest desire to lose no time. A detailed account of each individual capture would make rather uninteresting reading, so it must suffice to say that we did not cease until we had laid out on the grass eleven trout, the aggregate weight of which proved to be 14 lb. 10 oz. To us this means sport of the highest order, and in fact we have never basketed a finer lot of trout showing such a splendid average weight.

The rise was not yet over when we prepared to pack up for the homeward journey, but the light had gone, and our cup of happiness was overflowing.

CHAPTER XIV

A DAY ON LOCH LYON

A FIRST visit to a loch is always anticipated with the keenest pleasure, and our feelings of delight were but slightly concealed when we left the hospitable roof of the Royal Hotel, Tyndrum, at 7:30 on a July morning and boarded the car that stood waiting for us. We were accompanied by Johnnie, the indispensable, the man who knows every corner of Loch Lyon, every reed and weed in it, every twist and turn of the shore, every variety of fly which appeals to its free-rising, hard-fighting trout. There may be a better boatman toiling at the oars somewhere in this fair country, but we think not, for he seems to us to be the master of his somewhat trying profession. He sees that everything required to deal death to trout and to sustain the life of man is safely stowed away in the car, and off we set on a short but interesting run of about five miles. We climb steadily upwards until we reach the boundary of Argyllshire, and then we feel our way round the base of lofty Ben Odhar. The road winds steeply down, and its surface renders high speed inadvisable, but very soon we reach the bridge which spans the little river Conglass, which pursues its course thence

for six rocky miles before it goes to swell the Orchy.

Here we leave the luxurious comfort of the car and proceed on foot up the glen. Passing under a large viaduct which carries the West Highland Railway, we put behind us all traces of civilisation. The river keeps us company as we traverse a tortuous way between the towering mountains, Ben Doran, 3,523 feet, and Ben Chaistel, 2,897 feet, the latter characterised by overhanging rocky cliffs, in the shelter of which we readily distinguish a small herd of deer. It is not a troutful water, being too rocky and swift, but it is beloved by the Orchy salmon, which run up as early as July if the slightest spate gives them the least encouragement. Johnnie pointed out a pool not more than two feet in depth where he has seen as many as twelve salmon huddled together, arousing the primitive instincts in man, but on the occasion of our visit all temptation was absent, for owing to the abnormal drought no fish had yet reached these parts. Sometimes the way leads through small stony streams, easily negotiated, or through slightly marshy patches, but the journey is not arduous. We had heard more than once that the road to Loch Lyon involved the expenditure of much exertion and predicated the possession of much physical energy, but we are now able to affirm that these statements are absurd. The angler who cannot walk the six miles to Loch Lyon and thoroughly enjoy it is due to retire from participation in all but the mildest forms of angling.

After an hour we reach the half-way house, a lonely sheiling, but we do not halt, and soon we reach the

watershed and cross again into Perthshire. A corner of the loch presently comes into view, and then suddenly its whole expanse is visible. It is quite a small sheet, about two miles long, roughly rectangular in shape, about 1,000 feet above sea-level, and bounded north and south by high mountains. The weather experienced in these solitudes must at times be of the most terrifying description, and a thunder-storm must be truly alarming. At the head of the loch, besides a shooting-lodge or farmhouse, there are two shepherds' cottages, but for some time these have been untenanted, and it is probable that the chief reason is that no one can be found willing to condemn himself to a life of loneliness.

On our arrival a very light, fitful breeze from the east was raising the tiniest of wavelets, and it seemed doubtful whether it would die away altogether or change round to the west. We decided to make use of the little there was, and proceeded to drift towards the mouth of the river, which enters at the head of the loch. This is really a delightful bit of water to fish, a fine curving bay, with shores of golden sand, fringed with reeds, certainly very promising water. The first drift produced only half a dozen fish, and these of meagre dimensions, but meantime the wind had freshened, so we pulled half-way down the loch to the Poachers' Point.

On both sides of this low-lying promontory there are grand bays, and we began to get what Johnnie termed the true Loch Lyon brand, fine yellow trout, full of fight, running from one-third to half a pound, with occasionally a rather better specimen. It was remarkable that no fish were showing, there being no hatch of fly, but, notwithstanding that

fact, they seemed disposed to take anything that happened to come along. Using flies somewhat larger than standard Loch Levens, we cast before us, and the reels were screeching merrily and with agreeable frequency. Often we both were running fish simultaneously, and we were fortunate to be provided with two landing-nets.

The trout showed a preference for Peter Ross and the Butcher, but, as these happened to be respectively our tail- and bob-flies, their superior killing powers may have been due to their positions rather than to their own inherent value. Other flies which proved worthy of their place in the team were March Brown, Greenwell's Glory, Woodcock and Yellow. Sometimes the trout took the fly the moment it alighted on the water, sometimes the wily bob-fly worked across the waves had a fatal attraction, and occasionally it was only by sinking the flies considerably that we were rewarded. Whichever way they came, the answering strike had to be forthcoming immediately, for the trout of Loch Lyon are very agile and can reject a fly instantaneously. When hooked they leap into the air or bore deeply, pulling with a strength which, considering their size, is phenomenal.

The bow-rod, after reaching the fateful number thirteen, had almost given up in despair of surpassing that total, when he raised two trout at the same moment and succeeded in landing both. As each of them was a half-pounder in perfect condition, he must have had quite an exciting time piloting both into the landing-net. After lunch sport was not quite so brisk, and at 4 p.m. the wind died away completely after coming true from the east for so long a time. The loch became a mirror, unbroken by

the rise of any trout, so that fishing seemed to be labour in vain.

We counted the spoils, sixty-seven trout, which on being weighed later reached the respectable figure of 22 lb., so we decided to beach the boat and prepare for the homeward journey. Johnnie pleased us by remarking that it was the second best basket of the whole season, only five fish behind the record, which, moreover, had been made under better conditions, a fine steady breeze blowing all day from the west. We had only one regret, and that was that we had not been privileged to fish Invermearan Bay, reputed to be the best bit of the water, situated at the eastern extremity of the loch, but the omission was solely due to our distrust of the wind.

It is not advisable to come to conclusions after a single day's experience of a loch, and the practical hints which follow are those supplied by our boatman. We found his advice to be thoroughly sound. Small flies do not seem to have much attraction for the trout of Loch Lyon, except perhaps when the breeze is very light, and even under such conditions the size ordinarily used will prove to be equally serviceable. When a considerable wave is on, even larger flies, approaching sea-trout size, are advised, and it is then that the best sport is obtained and the best quality of fish captured.

Up till the end of July trout should be sought in the bays and round the shores in comparatively shallow water, but towards the end of the season they are to be found rising in deeper parts, even in the centre of the loch. Fine gut is not required, 2x thickness being sufficiently strong to tackle any

trout one is likely to meet, but of course refinement in materials always meets with an increase of sport.

The moods of the trout here, as elsewhere, vary from day to day, but unless they are taking very well the cast should be made straight down wind and a fairly long line should be used, so that the flies sink well into the water. When, however, the fish are coming freely, the bob-fly will do the major portion of the work, and the flies should therefore be sent out across the breeze so that they come across rather than through the waves.

The strike should be administered firmly at the slightest suspicion of a rise, for any failure to do so will mean an opportunity entirely lost. Not once during our day did we find a fish willing to make a second offer, but that, we were given to understand, is not characteristic of Loch Lyon trout at all times. In some places there are strong weeds which do not reach the surface, and in their vicinity a hooked trout should be held as firmly as the gut will permit, or it will at once seek safety amid their shelter. In July and later there are always a few grilse and salmon in the loch, which quite frequently are tempted to rise to a trout fly. They are usually to be found in well-defined areas, so that it is worth while spending some time over them.

There is not a dull moment during the day, for if the trout are not in taking mood Johnnie never spares himself, but gives the angler every opportunity of adding one more to the creel. He is always rowing up to a new bit, raising one's hopes and inciting him to renewed efforts. He has a name for every bay and point, and each place has its history. They are known to him by the names of doughty anglers

who have made them famous by record baskets. He is entertaining in the extreme, for he has had many experiences to relate. He describes how on one occasion huge, towering billows came rolling up the loch and breaking on the shores with thunderous roar, while meantime not the faintest breath of wind was stirring. The phenomenon was probably due to some seismic disturbance. Again, he tells of one angler who, evidently most optimistic, declared his intention of retaining no trout under nine inches in length, but unfortunately failed to capture a single specimen either above or below his limit.

In such wise our day passed very quickly, and we struck the homeward trail again. The car was awaiting our arrival, and soon we reached Tyndrum to receive the congratulations of the hotel proprietor, whose satisfaction always varies directly with the number of fish captured by his guests.

A day on Loch Lyon is an experience that will live long in the angler's memory, and one which he should strive his utmost to obtain.

CHAPTER XV

THE UPPER TWEED

IT must surely be the ambition of every angler to fish the bonnie Tweed ; it is almost a duty as it is a delight to make a pilgrimage to the romantic valley, so rich in song and tradition, where the very " air is full of ballad notes," where every hanging schaw has been sung and every deep hope has its story. From Stobo to Talla " lowpin' ow'r its linns " we have wandered rod in hand and often we have forgotten to place the flies across the sleeping pool and dancing stream, so much is there to distract the attention. Now the eye rests on leafy woods inviting to shade and rest, now it is held by the smoothly rounded slopes of innumerable hills, again it is attracted back to the fair river itself sparkling in unsullied purity.

It is a stream to please the angler, so many are its moods, so varied is its character. Here it trickles over a bed of glinting gravel to hesitate and slip along in a broad slow-moving glide, there it lingers in a still, silent pool ; here it frets among worn boulders and we must wade warily, yonder it curves boldly in a wide sweeping bend. Further on we find it staked and banked at the side to prevent it invading the adjacent holm. Once more it changes, spreading

itself out into a great breadth of extreme shallowness which holds no trout, but let it remain untouched, for that is the haunt of hosts of aquatic insects which fish hold in high esteem. Every few yards we are presented with a new problem and must devise a new method of attack. There is no time to weary, and the longest day is all too short to allow us to study adequately the approach and decide the place whereon to lay the lure that we may take toll of the numerous finely-proportioned trout.

Tweed in these upper reaches holds a few grayling of agreeable dimensions, a satisfactory stock of trout, and myriads of parr, which at times and in certain varieties of water may prove somewhat too eager for our taste. The lordly salmon also ascend to these parts, but delay their arrival until too late to receive attention from the angler; their sole desire is to reach the spawning redds and continue the race, but their appearance calls forth many an enemy. There are still lawless Borderers—and others no doubt, comparatively harmless imitators—who can and must wield the leister and burn the pool, to whom the pleasures of the rod are somewhat tame when compared with the wild joys of the icy water, a black night, and the possibility of detection and exciting chase. The sport is in their blood, and laws may not restrain them; the sight of a salmon in the pool arouses the old instincts. The crest of Peebles, three salmon, one with head upwards, the others head downwards, means, we suppose, that for every fish that goes up the river two should come down; but “there’s aye a cut o’ kipper in the auld burgh yet” seems to indicate a hope that that will happen after all human

efforts have been exercised to prevent it happening. As we proceed along the banks on some sunlit day in spring or early summer we have much to think about and we can picture to ourselves the wild forays of far-off days and the weird scenes on the wintry river, when the torches burn smokily, the gad strikes swiftly, and the slaughtered salmon lie gleaming on the frosted grass.

But it is time to be fishing. All the way there is a fine succession of pool and stream where every lure is useful in its season, and in its selection lies the main secret of success in Tweed. Often have we heard it declared that the trout in these parts are small, insignificant specimens unworthy of any angler's attention, but that verdict is most unjust and can be given only by the most inexperienced or by some who have been extremely unfortunate in the weather conditions prevailing at the time of their visit. Of course nothing but the most meagre results need be expected by those who persist in whipping the stream throughout the season with a cast of wet-flies, but anyone who cares to change his lure as the year progresses will find a very different and even a highly satisfactory return for his labours. The trout in Tweed being well accustomed to the angler's wiles have become wary and discriminating, and are not to be tempted unless some care is expended. In the early days of the season, when the lessons learned in the previous year have been forgotten to some extent, and while they are yet eager to make up the wastage of winter, they respond readily enough to the sunk fly.

Towards the end of May the creeper is the correct lure, followed in due course by the stone-fly. It

is an ideal river for the use of these baits, which demand for the full exercise of their powers strong, rough water, for it is there the larvæ live, and there, when their time arrives, they leave in search of the banks. After the passing of this deadly fly the trout, well fed as they now are, become cautious, and can well afford to ignore anything that creates within them the slightest suspicion. The worm in the early morning, the large fly at night will then do much execution, but during the day the most interesting and satisfactory sport will be enjoyed if the floating fly is pressed into service. There are some fine pools and glides eminently adapted for its successful use, and on many a July day and evening it has been the means of bringing us fine sport with trout from a quarter up to and over a pound in weight.

The most useful lure, however, is unquestionably the natural minnow, whether the water be flooded or clear, and if any angler would realise how exceedingly deadly the spinning bait can be, he must visit Tweed. It is astonishing to see the avidity with which the fish throw themselves upon it, even the ubiquitous, courageous parr attempts it, and the largest trout do not ignore it. It is almost too deadly, for on some days we have found it almost impossible to make a cast without getting an offer, but, of course, many escape being hooked. We never saw a minnow in Tweed, so that they must be scarce, if not entirely absent, therefore the angler should provide himself with a plentiful supply before setting out. Herein may lie the reason for the pronounced liking, the dainty being as welcome as it is uncommon. Sticklebacks

are fairly numerous and easily caught, but do not spin well, while parr-tail, which is often recommended, is forbidden.

There are some particularly delightful parts between Stobo and Biggar Water Foot, and just before Drummelzier Burn enters there is a long broad flat of fine depth which will with careful treatment provide a glorious hour with the dry-fly. At the suspension footbridge at Mossfennan there is a grand pool for an evening rise, but it is needless to mention all, for they occur at varying intervals up to Carlowse Bridge, where the waters are confined deep and black in a rocky gorge and where active schoolboys boast of leaping across the Tweed.

Tributary streams, bearing names known in romance, are continually inviting us to leave the main river and penetrate their secrets ; Biggar Water has always failed to lure us away ; Drummelzier, however, we have traced to its fount in the innermost recesses of the hills and come back laden with spoils ; Holms Water, too, has yielded us some fine days and baskets of its brilliant clear-skinned trout.

Stanhope Water, largest and best of all, merits a lengthier notice. It is a glorious stream worthy of many days, full of trout of finest quality, not puny, little, inexperienced fish but desirable trophies that would delight any angler privileged to fish it. Judge it not by its appearance as it loses itself in the brimming Tweed ; pass over the first few hundred yards where it races swift and shallow over the accumulated debris washed from the hills throughout the centuries ; join it above the farm where it falls from one deep pool to another, cascade upon cascade, and from safe hiding study

the bubbling waters with watchful eye. Thread a little buoyant Greenwell to the cast, oil it well, and lay it delicately on the lifting water, where it swells hesitatingly before plunging over the fall. Let the line be short and the fly in complete command, and if the result is not a gleaming flash from a broad golden flank followed by an exciting fight up and across, around and down the pool, and a frantic attempt to dive through the white curtain to the pool below, then the reason is simply that the favourable moment has not arrived, and the delight is only deferred until the next visit.

Continue up the glen, searching every promising pool as it is met until the broader strath is reached, where the hills recede and the water sings another melody, light and tripping. Here the little fly will float as enticingly as ever, but, if variety is pleasant, substitute the bright red worm, and all demands will be satisfied. Stay a moment at the little cottage on the hill and lighten the burden of the creel. Proceed again to deep black pool slumbering between high banks adorned with heath and fern; beware the backward throw lest it droop too low; beware the forward cast to the flowery edge that the fly may not hook the hanging leaves and the pool be lost; play the fighting trout with firm yet careful hand to the tail and run him ashore on a little creek of glistening sand. Then, as the shadows lengthen, turn to the westering sun and blithely wander down the glen.

Loch Talla also demands attention. We have had but a single day on it, a day of undimmed sunshine and absolute calm, so that great sport was not expected. We wandered along the banks, high

above the water of wonderful transparency, and cast a fly now and then, but though we succeeded in enticing a few trout to leave the depths they, as a rule, beat a hasty retreat after inspecting the lures from close range. Time after time—every movement was distinctly visible—they would come boldly up as if they had every intention of gulping down the fly, but at the last moment with an aggravating flourish of the tail they would turn. One, however, coming to the bob ventured rather near and sank rather too leisurely, for, as we quickly struck, the third and then the second fly gave him a nasty jar, but the tail-fly, ever deadly, obtained a secure hold in the dorsal fin. Then some excitement was forthcoming, but the blank was duly saved and a fine pounder at last graced the creel. A fish rising far out gave us another opportunity, and it accepted the floating fly which we managed with an effort to put over it, but that completed the total for the day. The number and quality of the fish seen make us eager to see Loch Talla again, when conditions are favourable, but one great attraction of the whole district lies in the fact that good sport is assured, no matter what variety of weather is granted, provided only that judicious selection of burn, loch, or river is made.

CHAPTER XVI

AMONG REEDS AND WEEDS

WE admit the possession of a strong predilection for cruising about in the vicinity of weeds and reeds. Whenever the boatman proceeds to work his craft quietly and carefully down a bed of reeds, we are in our element and cast our flies with all the eagerness and assiduity that we can muster. Nor is the reason far to seek, for in these cool deeps great trout lurk and, when fancy takes them, roam about seeking what they may devour. As a general rule clustered round the base of the reeds are found clumps of low-growing weeds, within the shelter of which various forms of aquatic life are wont to sport, and numerous flies spend the subaqueous portion of their existence. Thus is explained our preference.

Moreover, as regards weeds, whether but dimly seen far below or actually reaching the surface, we approach every clump in the same spirit of hopefulness, for, in the absence of a rise, each one gives us a target to aim for—a great matter—and besides we are fairly confident that any tuft, however small, is the resting place or feeding station of a worthy fish which we may be fortunate enough to discover of a humour which most appeals to us.

We have specially happy memories of the reed-beds of Loch Lossit in Islay, of Loch Voil, Balquhiddy, and of Loch Ard, but one loch on which we used to be frequently privileged to fish offered many attractions and presented many difficulties that these know not.

It is within sight and sound of the restless Atlantic, and when a southerly gale raises miniature breakers on this little loch the salt tang of the sea assails the lips. It suffers, indeed, from this proximity, for a visitor all too frequent is that bird of ill omen, that relentless enemy of the trout, the cormorant or scart, as it is commonly termed. On a rocky point, off which among the ledges faintly visible in the tinted water good trout are readily taken, there are always in evidence when we arrive two or more of these destructive birds, whose favourite practice when at rest is to stand motionless with wings outspread as if to dry. Along the shore at all too numerous intervals are to be found the bones and debris of their victims, disgorged as indigestible. Every such patch is sufficient and conclusive evidence of the insatiable rapacity of these voracious feathered poachers, and offers unmistakable proof that it is absolutely impossible to maintain a fishery in a satisfactory state if these marauders are permitted to come and go unmolested. Their appetites are enormous—of that we have had abundant demonstration—and than this loch, such is its wealth of fish life, there can be no happier feeding ground or one so readily accessible. The weeds, which in the height of summer cover the loch almost over its entire area, will undoubtedly afford the fish some measure of protection.

The loch is very shallow, and on a clear day following a period characterised by light breezes the average depth is readily seen to be about three or four feet, but very seldom is it found in this state, for the winds stir up the mud and render the water an unlovely colour.

One who has not seen it can have very little idea of the tremendous density of the growth which lines the shores; the number of different varieties of aquatic plants which here flourish in such profusion must be enormous, and their stems twisted and laced together cause the formation of an entangled mass through which only with the greatest difficulty can the boat be propelled. A few square yards here and there along one bank seem to be unfavourable to the growth of these weeds, and at such places and also in the centre of the loch excellent sport is at times obtainable.

It is a fact well known to those who have much experience of the loch that on one day the trout may be as eager for the fly as any angler could desire, and on the next, though conditions may be to all appearance precisely similar, the reverse may hold, the fish showing complete indifference to all the angler's lures and wiles, and the surface remaining undisturbed by a single rise. Time and again this feature has been very forcibly brought before our notice, and it is just possible that the difference in the trout's behaviour is ruled by an alteration in the activities of the many creatures which inhabit the lower strata of the waters. Certainly on more than one occasion when things have gone badly with us we have found that every individual of the few captured had been

indulging in a hearty meal of mollusca, in this instance the snail *limnea peregra*. No better habitat for this valuable and favourite food of trout could be imagined, for, feeding as it does on fresh or decomposed vegetable matter, there is an unlimited supply of the material necessary to its well-being.

Again in the burn that connects the loch with the sea, there is an immense run of elvers, and we have had all necessary proof that when such are available trout take toll of them with avidity. On two consecutive Saturdays we fished that burn—this is ancient history, for such small streams no longer hold the slightest attractions for us—and the sport could fairly be described as phenomenal and a perfect revelation to us that such numbers could inhabit so small a stream. There had been a protracted period of drought, so much so that the water in places was entirely under cover of the gravel, and we fished the worm. By means of a longish rod, and by dint of much creeping and crawling we kept out of sight of the trout, and the basket was the disgraceful one of fifteen dozen. Nor were any of these six-inch fingerlings, but all were quite respectable trout, and the reason why we relate the tale is that nearly every fish as it was knocked on the head disgorged an elver. It is certain that shoals of these wriggling creatures will reach the loch, because there are no obstructions that they would find difficult to negotiate, and, when they do arrive, they will receive undoubtedly a hearty welcome from the trout, but on the other hand, the angler's labours will be very much in vain.

These two factors, then, it seems to us will con-

tribute materially to and account occasionally for the trouts' heart-breaking dourness which is manifested on this loch frequently when one would expect from the conditions to have a great response to his efforts. We have had a greater proportion of blank days here than on any other loch, and it offers some slight consolation when we can explain away the disagreeable fact by such theoretical considerations as we have given.

We have had some really good and on occasions wonderful sport on this uninviting, weed-surrounded loch, and nowhere known to us is the glorious uncertainty of angling, one of the great attractions of the sport, so clearly demonstrated. At the same time there is yet another exasperating feature or characteristic of the wily denizens of this water, one which we have never met with elsewhere, and one, moreover, of which we can offer no explanation that satisfies even ourselves.

Not on a single day but on many days we have found trout rising well and taking flies from the surface, and no matter how carefully we covered the rise with wet flies or with floating flies, which seemed to us faultless representations of those actually being taken, we failed lamentably to tempt a fish. What makes this more remarkable still is that when we did not cover a rising fish, we very often indeed received the welcome answer, and these days of which we speak were among the best experienced. There is no doubt that the trout are the most shy variety of their species that we have encountered, but that in no way explains the mystery that continues to baffle us. It may be that after having taken a fly a trout would remain

so near the surface looking for another that it might likewise have become aware of our presence, but if that had been so we would probably have been able to see the fish so hovering.

There are some very large trout in the loch, as is to be expected from the superabundance of food and shelter provided, but the largest it has been our good fortune to secure was a magnificently conditioned specimen of $2\frac{1}{2}$ lb., which succumbed to the fascinations of a diminutive Teal and Green. It provided a most exciting piece of sport, the odds being all in the trout's favour, for it was hooked within the edge of the weeds. It was only by playing it firmly and by bullying it round and among the long thick stems of water-lilies that we managed to bring it safely to net. A rod with a very supple top-joint that we happened to be using that day helped considerably to this result, though it proved a handicap at other times.

Though we hesitate to say so, we have hooked and lost one or two which were much heavier; but that is the experience of everyone. One of seven pounds is recorded, taken on a worm by an angler float-fishing from the bank. Several baskets up to thirty trout averaging half a pound, and invariably containing one or more over the pound limit, testify to the large head of trout maintained in spite of the numerous cormorants which infest the loch, and prove that at times the trout throw off that dourness which at others they display with all the power within them.

Owing presumably to some change in the arrangements between landlord and tenant, access to the

loch and the privilege of fishing in it are now unfortunately denied, and consequently it must remain unnamed. We have described its characteristics in the hope that anglers who may have had similar experiences elsewhere may here find possible reasons for some of the problems with which they have been confronted.

CHAPTER XVII

A HILL LOCH

THERE is a little loch high up in the Perthshire hills, a truly troutful water lying between Loch Earn and Loch Tay, so well stocked and carefully preserved that we had never even hoped to visit it. Our pleasure was therefore the greater when we received an invitation to test its capabilities. Pleasant hours of preparation and anticipation went rapidly past till on the chosen morning we arrived betimes at the farmhouse whence the ascent is least arduously undertaken.

A full fortnight of unsettled weather did not augur well for the sport, but ever hopeful, as all anglers are, we shoulder the equipment, both necessary and superfluous, and set out under a sky heavy with cloud, dark and threatening. A rough, steep cart-track marks the first stage of the journey, and then we take to the hills, but the way does not call for immense exertions, for the route is carefully planned, not over summits, but through gaps in the hills or at worst over gentle slopes. We are thankful for so much, as we are yet in poor training for such unwonted exercise, but one or two days in the open, rod in hand and creel on

back, will fit us to accomplish even more with ease, but that day is not yet, and we are glad to rest and view the fair scenes of mountain, forest, and loch that we are leaving behind.

A wise old spaniel accompanies us, never straying far afield, but rather leading the way, and from a patch of heathery ground flushes a covey of grouse; the old birds lure it on in their own fashion away from the vicinity, and, the trick satisfactorily performed, return to their domestic cares.

Now we pass over ideal natural golfing ground, short springing turf which renders walking easy and makes us forget the steep ascent with which we had perforce to begin. An hour has passed, not without some hard breathing, when we win the final crest and gaze down on the loch of our search, the loch of the leaping trout. The descent is quickly made, and crossing the outflowing burn over a row of firmly set stepping-stones we reach the boathouse. Without pausing to rest, we mount the fly-rods, eager as ever and in haste, for we view coming up another valley the keeper, our boatman for the day. Though encumbered as he is with bag, gun, and pair of oars, he, accustomed to the hill and the heather, arrives before we are ready, and proceeds to remove from the boat the rainwater which has been so lavishly showered upon it.

We point enquiringly to the gun, and for answer he indicates two forms floating in the farthest corner of the loch—cormorants. These birds are a pest on a trout loch, however picturesque they may be when perched on a rocky islet by the sea, and we are glad to learn that a price is put upon their heads which the keeper has often earned and always

tries his utmost to earn. The insatiable brutes account for an enormous number of trout, but are shy and wary, and never throughout the entire day do they allow us to come within range. The pair of them in the boat would be equivalent to a better day's fishing than we have ever had, and we are thankful to know that sooner or later they will fall to the unerring deadliness of the keeper's aim.

The spaniel is the first to embark, selecting a corner seat in the stern, from which, of course, he must be dislodged. His views and ours are diametrically opposite. He thinks fishing an awful waste of time, but is willing to suffer it patiently for the sake of the walk up and down the hill. We set a course for the top of the gentle southerly breeze, but our luck is out, for down the wind comes the everlasting mist, to develop presently into a drenching rain. We think that not an adverse condition, but the boatman sadly informs us that the trout in this loch steadfastly refuse to rise in rain, and he is right.

We cast our flies none the less perseveringly, but we are still new to the loch and our eyes wander all around on the unaccustomed sights. It would seem that we are by the sea-shore and not dozens of miles inland surrounded by the mountains, for the air is filled with the screeching of gulls. Here they nest, and even now the young are in evidence, standing uncertain on a ledge of rock and attempting a short flight as we approach, but they do not arouse within us blood-thirsty thoughts as do the cormorants, riding the waves at a safe distance, for they are less harmful to the trout and have a beauty which appeals.

A missed rise brings us quickly back to attention to the real business on hand, and we cast hopefully down a bed of reeds, but no answering boil rewards our unceasing efforts. The rain and mist cease for a space, the sun shines dimly and wanly through a film of cloud, and the indefatigable boatman rows over at express speed to his favourite drift, a never-failing reach across the mouth of a burn. Just at the expected spot up comes a trout and takes down the fly in no half-hearted manner; at first we marvel at the gallant struggle exhibited by this nimble half-pounder, but when at last he is safely in the boat we are lost in admiration of his surpassing comeliness. Small in head and of great girth for his length, he is liberally besprinkled with the brightest vermilion, and we are surprised to learn that he is of Loch Leven extraction and has acquired these characteristics in his peat-tinted abode. Against the dark background his silvery sides would have made him an easy prey to his winged enemies, and his changed colouring affords him some measure of protection, but the fact that such a miracle has been performed fills us with amazement. Truly we are very ignorant of trout and the ways of wild life; we can only wonder and admire.

The burn, off which our first trout fell, being the only stream of any consequence feeding the loch, is worthy of a little examination. A few yards from its mouth it falls over a high rock, sufficiently steep to render the higher reaches inaccessible to the trout in the loch, with the result that the available accommodation for spawning is exceedingly limited. Not only so, but even that is very unsuitable, so that

the trout must spawn in the shallows of the loch itself, and when that is the rule results are, we believe, never entirely satisfactory. Artificial stocking is resorted to, but has not been done for some years, and we did capture one or two trout which from their age and size showed unmistakably that they had been produced in the way designed by nature.

An occasional rise keeps our efforts from flagging, but the boatman tells us that we have found the loch at its very worst, and in despair he takes us over the very choicest bit, a secret shallow in the centre known only to a few whose good fortune it is to have frequent access to these waters. True to its reputation, it yields in rapid succession two fine fish as comely in appearance as the rest, but even this part fails to produce a result in any way commensurate with the great stock it supports. There is not the slightest doubt that we have been unfortunate in our choice of day, but that has only the effect of making us work the harder.

A torrential deluge of rain makes us think of lunch and the comparative comfort of the low-roofed, draughty boathouse. We become a little happier, and decide that the six bonnie trout lying in the boat form not such a bad take after all. As we rest the wind freshens to a strong breeze, adding new hopes, for every change in the conditions makes us hopeful that we shall find a corresponding alteration in the trouts' appetite, but, though we try them with various casts bearing flies of all patterns and several sizes, we fail to discover anything that arouses more than the faintest interest.

We notice a fly blown along the waves, and

presently it is swallowed up, a great boil marking the scene of its disappearance—a phenomenon not repeated all day. A long cast it is, but we rapidly pull off line, and, the wind greatly helping and kindly directing, we manage to lay the tail-fly exactly where required, when we have the intense satisfaction of raising, hooking, and finally landing the fish. It is a pleasing experience, and goes a long way to counteract a blank hour.

Again the light becomes a little less dim, though still the sun just fails to struggle through the clouds, and the period of greatest activity during the day begins; more frequent rises are the rule for a short time, and the score mounts up, but it is dreary fishing under such unpleasant conditions, when the monotony of the incessant casting is so seldom relieved by an offer accepted or missed. The keeper is thoroughly disgusted with the display his favourite loch is making, and works his hardest, rowing us up to bays still untried or balancing the boat on a drift in the uncertain, shifting wind, inciting us to renewed efforts, but, in spite of all, the results are meagre return for the labour expended. In many a loch, however, they would be considered quite good, but here the trout are usually so keen for the fly that we have prepared ourselves for a day of great sport, and our disappointment is consequently all the greater.

In the end the clouds sink down upon the hills, which are blotted out from view, the rain descends till the waves are beaten down, not a patch of hope appears in the skies, and we flee before the fury of the storm. We have created a record, not of the kind, however, that is agreeable to the angler, for our

basket, fifteen trout, is the smallest that has ever been carried down the hill. We seek shelter for a while but the storm shows no sign of abating, and we commence the journey homewards. Now we begin to realise what we have been subjected to during the day, for burns that had been quietly flowing when we passed them as we blithely ascended the hill in the morning are now raging torrents. The hill-sides are seamed with white, and the roar of many waters is in our ears. The cart-track near the farm is now a merry stream, down which we must wade, but that cannot make us more uncomfortable than we are.

Some other time the fates may be kind and grant us a fine sunshiny day, with a brisk breeze bearing to the loch swarms of flies, which will arouse the trout into taking a lively interest in our selection. Then down the hill at close of day we shall carry a great take of these beautifully shaped and brilliantly starred hard-fighting trout whose equals we have seldom seen.

CHAPTER XVIII

NIGHT-FISHING

FREQUENTLY throughout a hot, breathless day of June or July we have gone in search of a shady nook and whiled away the long hours impatiently awaiting the cool of the evening. At last when the sun has set in a blaze of splendour, we have donned waders and sought the river, accompanied by the ever-faithful little ten-footer. A gently rippling stream at the head of a long "flat" is our favourite objective, for there we know will be crowded together the inhabitants of the pool expecting, like ourselves, the gloaming rise.

For the last hour or more the spinners have been indulging in their rhythmic vertical dance, but now their life's work is completed, and they fall on the surface of the stream, wings outspread, vitality exhausted. Their gauzy, iridescent, transparent wings almost defy imitation, but they are admirably suggested by short hackle-points laid on horizontally at right angles to the hook. Lying so close to the surface, the natural spent spinner is almost invisible to the angler, and in our earlier days we were for a time completely baffled in our efforts to discover what dainty morsel it was that used to cause such a display of energy on the part

of the trout. Even after we did succeed in solving the mystery, we also, confused by the superabundance of our opportunities, exhibited a corresponding amount of excitement, with the result that we failed lamentably to reap the full advantage from them. Now, however, when such a welcome combination of circumstances occurs, we use a single dry-fly of the type already mentioned, and give it our undivided attention. We then select a fish which appears worthy of the occasion, and which has settled down in earnest to enjoy its banquet. We carefully and completely ignore all others—and to do so requires much determination and self-restraint—until it has been hooked or put down. A minute or two will suffice to produce either effect, after which we choose another victim. Often we have had a crowded hour of joy ; often we have met with a series of disasters.

Again, not infrequently the expected rise has failed to take place, and there we may be a mile from home and the creel clean. That is but an insignificant detail so far as we ourselves are concerned, but we think of the pained faces which will greet our arrival, those faces from which all faith, trust, and confidence in our powers will vanish, and so under such compulsion we decide to fish home.

Of course we are prepared for such an eventuality, but we feel somewhat guilty, for we do not think it quite sportsmanlike to attack the wary trout under cover of night. It looks rather like taking a mean advantage over them, but they do the same very often with us, so we may be excused our attempts at revenge. Night-fishing is usually,

though it need not be, a coarse practice, and it might be for the benefit of sport generally if it were discontinued altogether, but the necessity for such restriction has not yet become clamant. There is a certain eeriness about night-fishing that is not entirely unpleasant, a feeling that one is taking part in some adventure that appeals strongly to an angler.

Fishing by night is at times ridiculously easy, resulting in fine takes of first-class trout, while on other nights apparently quite as promising no sport whatever is obtained. Of course that is characteristic of fishing at all times. We are convinced that little refinement in tackle is demanded, but as we go out for sport rather than for fish we use fine gut, though not so fine as we use during the day, the reason being that heavier fish are encountered as such prefer to feed under cover of night. Again, in the absence of wind, we find the finest of gut somewhat more difficult to cast, and it is on absolutely calm nights that we generally meet with most success. Our experience also goes to show that the flies intended for use at night should not be too finely dressed, a certain coarseness in the wings and body being more acceptable to the trout.

As soon as night falls the largest trout in a river repair to their feeding stations, which are often situated at quite a considerable distance—more than a hundred yards sometimes—from their usual abodes. When spending a week or more by the river, we make a point of learning such places, and often we have proved that the trouble is worth taking. Almost any villager will

give away the usual haunts of every big trout in the district, but further particulars can hardly be expected. Such fish indulge habitually in a minnow diet, but frequently take a few phryganidæ or sedge-flies, of which our night-flies are mainly representations.

We use these sedge-flies, both dry and wet, for the use of the dry-fly is by no means confined to the daylight hours. A rise is quite visible when it occurs between the angler and the west, but if we find it impossible to get into such a position we strike whenever we hear, feel, or suspect a rise. Moreover, we are quite aware that a trout more often hooks itself than we are sometimes inclined to admit. It is, however, with the wet-fly that we usually try to lure the trout at night, and we do not believe in using more than two of them on the cast. To increase the number often causes vexatious delays, for a hooked fish may easily tie up the cast in a hopeless tangle, bad enough to unravel in the full light of day, but almost impossible at night. That is another reason why we use stronger gut, 1x to be precise, for with it a "fankle" does not so readily occur, and, moreover, if it should happen, it is more easily undone than is the case with a gossamer cast.

We pass over the deep, still pools, hard-flowing necks, and broken water generally, and confine our attentions to the tails of pools and long shallows. We exercise considerable caution in approaching the stream, so that the trout may not be alarmed, by keeping as near the water as possible and by careful wading. Any mistake on our part is at once followed by a number of furrows through the

shallows caused by the disturbed fish beating a hasty retreat into the depths. We have, on the contrary, found that when trout are rising greedily and noisily the leaping of a hooked fish—and, for some unexplained reason, these almost invariably leap wildly at night—has no effect on the others, which will continue to feed throughout the disturbance. Of course, when the opportunity presents itself, we cast over rising fish, but if feeding trout are not in evidence we do not rush to the conclusion that angling is labour in vain. In fact, when such is the case, the best baskets are often obtained.

Our method, then, is as follows: We cast our flies directly across the stream, so that the tail-fly reaches the opposite bank, and in delivering the cast we lower the point of the rod until it almost touches the surface. We allow the flies to sink deeply while they are moving down stream, and by a slow movement of the rod, the top of which is not raised, we keep in close contact with the lure. This keeping of a tight line is the principal secret of success, but a delicacy of touch is also highly essential. We strike firmly whenever we feel or suspect the slightest stoppage of the flies' progress, which will in a flat free from weeds or other obstructions be due to the attentions of a fish. The ability to answer at once in this way results in one angler filling his basket, while another, who has had as many offers, unfelt and unaccepted, comes home "clean." We admit that, owing to having received no hints or instructions, it took us a fairly long time to learn that these momentary stoppages were caused by trout, and we believe that any angler

trying night-fishing for the first time will allow several offers to pass unheeded unless he impresses these remarks deeply on his mind. At night trout are leisurely in their movements, except when hooked, and seem to stop the fly, rather than to seize it, and consequently the hook must be driven home without hesitation, before the fish has time to reject it with contempt.

One very good river angler, who occasionally tries night-fishing, and almost always is very successful, has found his baskets are considerably improved when he lashes a small hook to the large one on which the fly is dressed, so that it projects about a quarter of an inch. Possibly trout caught on this hook—be it understood, they are not foul hooked—open their mouths to stop the fly, and in so doing manage to gulp down the deadly addition to the tackle. Short-rising fish frequently meet their doom in the same way.

We have also frequently found the natural minnow a very deadly bait on dark summer nights, and by its means we have taken some exceptionally fine trout. We are of opinion that it must be fished very slowly, and not spun quickly as is desirable during the day, and occasionally we have proved it to be equally attractive when used more after the manner in which the worm is employed. We have heard it stated that even if allowed to lie on the bottom it will often lure a good fish, but we have never been tempted to put it to the trial. We generally, if not always, find it advisable not to strike the moment a fish is felt, having missed many a good trout by so doing. We usually allow the fish a few seconds to take a good hold of the bait,

after which we strike with firmness. For this reason we recommend for successful night-fishing a flight furnished with very few hooks; in fact, our experience indicates that Stewart's tackle—i.e., a single large hook, either with or without a lip-hook, cannot be improved upon. As for artificial minnows, we feel convinced that they are absolutely worthless at night, though they may account for a few fish during the day.

There are other baits which will at times help to fill the creel at night, but the fly and minnow are the two that can be usually relied upon to do most execution. Of the others we have had very little experience.

CHAPTER XIX

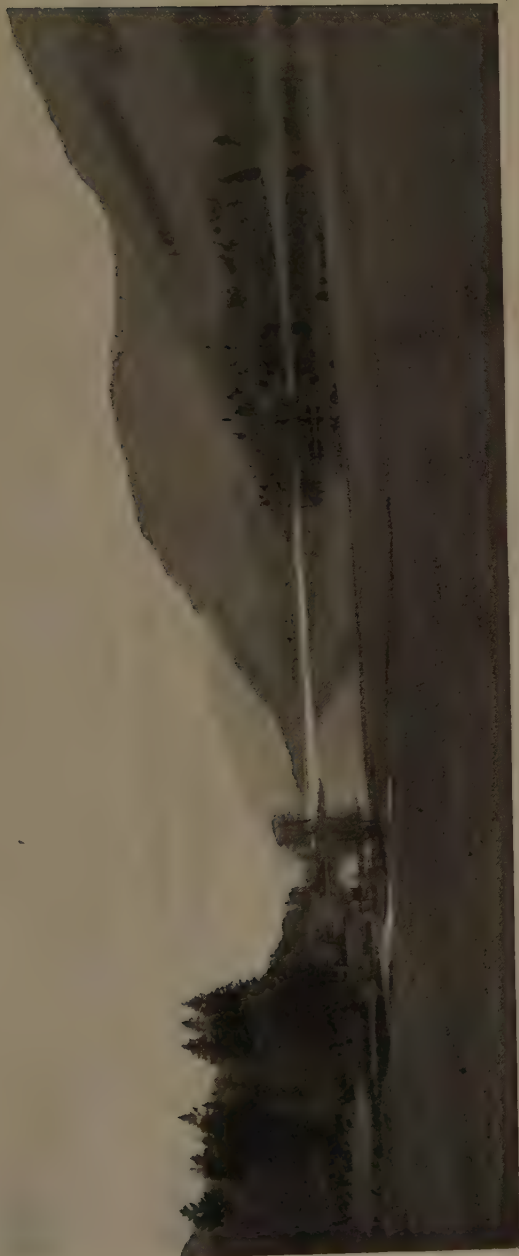
BY THE BRAES O' BALQUHIDDER

HIGH above the winding course of the sluggish Balvaig the road twines and turns with many a steep rise and fall, threading a narrow way through the Kirkton of Balquhidder towards the shores of Loch Voil and the land of romance that lies beyond. Here we are in the midst of many waters ; the fine expanse of the loch lies before us ; the roar of the Monachyle Burn tumbling down its rocky glen is in our ears ; to the west lie lone Loch Doine and the remote Lochlarig Water ; all around are the towering mountains seamed with lesser streams. Every variety of trouting water that angler could desire is here, loch and stream, placid river and brawling torrent, and a month is all too short for a thorough enjoyment of the delights enclosed within the Braes o' Balquhidder.

Loch Voil, in common with many other Perthshire lochs, does not fish well in the height of summer, and will be found in an average season to give sport up to the maximum of its power in the month of May. It is therefore somewhat later than Loch Ard and Loch Lubnaig, and consequently occupies with Loch Vennacher a position between these early waters and the essentially summer lochs of the

North. At any period of the year, however, some sport may be forthcoming, and may even be confidently expected. We have taken, for example, a basket of sixteen trout of very fair quality from it on a July day, but as a general rule disappointments will be fewer in May than at any other time. The trout of Loch Voil have not, as far as we ever discovered, any peculiarities of taste as regards patterns of flies, the ordinary standard sizes and varieties being quite effective enough to satisfy most people. They are not guilty either of excessive shyness, two at a cast being a not infrequent occurrence during a hearty rise, but they are not lacking in courage. On a good day the average will be quite half a pound, and one or more specimens up to or over a pound are generally encountered. Much heavier fish are occasionally heard of as having fallen to fly or minnow, but they are exceptional. A few salmon every year manage to accomplish the very varied journey from the sea to the loch, and any angler, who is fortunate enough to know or has the services of a boatman who knows the banks whereon they are wont to rest, has a reasonable chance of hooking one of them. Instances of them accepting a trout-fly are not unknown, but we would not set out hopefully for a Loch Voil salmon.

The loch does certainly not suffer from overfishing, and the angler who is fortunate enough to secure for a day the only boat that is available to the public will in all probability find himself alone on the water. This boat lies at the east end, and there is, or at least there used to be, a stretch preserved in this vicinity over which the angler must proceed without fishing. Conscientiously we have obeyed



BY THE BRAES O' BALOUHIDDER.

the rule, feeling very virtuous, for the temptation to break it is sometimes very great ; to refrain from casting over a rising trout involves a strain that no angler should subject himself to, and therefore it is advisable to delay attaching the cast of flies to the line until the danger zone is safely left behind.

There are many fine bays, some of them lined with reeds, others studded with lily-pads, also rocky points, mouths of burns, where the angler will lay his flies with care and be almost certain of reward ; but the choicest part, a broad bay of sand and gravel, lies at the extreme west, and there the major portion of the day will most probably be spent. A short river, through which it is possible to propel the boat, connects Loch Voil with Loch Doine, and there the sport may be continued as long as desired. Only once, however, did we enter it, but we did not find it superior to the larger loch ; we feel that it should be better, and possibly we have erred in not visiting it more frequently.

We have had excellent sport in Loch Voil by fishing from the bank. This we indulged in generally in the evenings, when conditions were suitable, and often the result of an hour's casting would be better than that obtained from a full day in the boat. A little more activity was usually apparent in the evening, and very enjoyable it was to wander down the shores casting the fly at random or over a rise. Sometimes the wet-fly was the lure used, as often the floating fly, but on one occasion when showers of diminutive black flies were being blown off the hazels we used a cast of river-flies, one of which, a Black Spider, accounted in a very short time for six handsome trout.

The loch can be very wild and stormy at times. The winds come sweeping down the glens and, meeting on the loch, raise a great turmoil of chopping white-crested waves ; we have seen the spindrift flying, whirling columns of spray lifted high in air, and through it all we have fished, although at times the flies refused to go where desired, and the cast was tied up into uselessness. We have seen the loch absolutely calm under a broiling sun, when to fish seemed utter folly, but a cast of flies trailed behind the boat never failed to save the blank and add a little variety to the monotony of rowing. Loch Voil is a water which can always be depended upon to yield a fair amount of sport, and now and then grants a basket which will satisfy anyone, no matter how accustomed he is to great days.

The river Balvaig, which connects Loch Voil with Loch Lubnaig, bears no great reputation as an angling water. It is in the hands of an association, the members of which fish it assiduously. Their favourite baits appear to be the worm and dock-grub, which will account for a few fish at all times and in times of flood may cause great slaughter ; night-fishing with the fly and minnow is prevalent. Possibly they maintain the head of fish by liberal stocking, but on that point we have no information ; it may even be considered that the river receiving, as it does, so much assistance from the loch, can quite well look after itself, but it is generally agreed that the prospects of sport of a high order are not bright, and very few, we imagine, outside the association will take the trouble to arrange an expedition to it. As it leaves Loch Voil, and for the first mile or so of its course, it is quite a pleasant river to fish, fine pool

and rippling stream occurring alternately, while lower down it glides between high banks, so that, as there is scarcely any perceptible flow, it is only in exceptional circumstances that successful fishing is possible. On these slowly moving reaches we obtained the best sport when a very high wind was blowing, both the wet-fly and minnow meeting then with satisfactory response. Whenever a gentle upstream breeze prevailed we used instead the floating fly, and many a fine trout have we taken from the Balvaig by this means.

The upper part is, however, infinitely to be preferred, as here we have the variety which makes so great an appeal to the angler and helps him through many a mediocre day, renewing his hopes at every little change in the stream. In it are to be found gravelly shallows shaded here and there with bushes where a cast of spiders will work havoc ; there are some cunning little corners where a bright worm deftly placed by the concealed angler is certain of acceptance ; there are stately pools too where a dry-fly cast up stream or floated down below the trees will lure a plucky fish. In spite of the excessive amount of thrashing to which the river is subjected, it still holds some particularly fine trout, so that there is always the possibility that an exceptional fish will take the lure. We have pleasant recollections of fine evenings on the Balvaig, when the creel invariably held at dusk a few half-pounders and occasionally even a weightier specimen. We did not visit it in the hope of making record baskets, but it was nevertheless a fine place to spend a quiet hour after a heavy day on the loch.

A stream of a totally different character is the

Monachyle Burn, which enters Loch Voil from the north. It is a typical mountain torrent, and, as is to be expected from its nature, is the home of a race of hardy but diminutive trout. A day up the glen, alone with the music of the stream in the solitude of the mountains, is a pleasant experience; the rod furnishes an excuse if any be required, but one soon tires of playing with and returning so many fingerlings which would find a happier hunting ground if they would but drop down stream to the loch; the journey might prove rather dangerous.

We have penetrated even as far as the Lochlarig, which enters at the head of Loch Doine, and there in a few minutes we took three fine trout, the best almost a pound in weight, but for one reason or another we did not pay it another visit. In this we are guilty of neglecting our opportunities, for it is a very troutful water in which the baskets are reckoned in dozens. Nor are these insignificant fish like those of Monachyle, but well-conditioned trout of good quality. It is no uncommon sight to see a party of anglers walking the nine miles from Kingshouse Station to the Lochlarig, and returning twenty-four hours later laden with heavy creels. That appears to us to be a case of converting a pleasure into a toil and of throwing away the benefits derivable from a day's fishing.

There are high up in the hills between Balquhiddier and Luib one or two little lochs which are reputed to be really extraordinary as regards the sport they afford, but we understand that they are most rigorously preserved, and are fished only by the favoured few and by those who do not regard a permit as a necessary possession. Restrictions may

be irksome to some, but these should recognise that the privilege of fishing Loch Voil could be easily withdrawn, and that many might thus be made to suffer for the errors of the few. A small charge is made for the use of the boat on Loch Voil, and the proceeds are devoted to the maintaining of a hatchery at Balquhiddar, from which the trout are from time to time transferred to the loch or its tributary streams. Such an arrangement is excellent, and might with considerable advantage be adopted in other localities.

CHAPTER XX

LOCH EARN

OUR experience of this beautiful loch, the headwaters of the bonnie Earn, is limited to the month of July, probably in most lochs the least productive period of the angler's season. We therefore have not known it at its best, and yet we have pleasant recollections. As a rule it matters little to us whether the trout are responsive to the fly or not, though we admit that a totally blank day anywhere is unpleasant, but on Loch Earn even that calamity would be supportable, as the scene is of such entrancing beauty that to concentrate the attention on fishing is almost impossible. The eyes are continually being diverted from the cast of questing flies to gaze upon the surrounding magnificence. The impetuous streams of the Ogle, the Ample, and the Beich tumbling through their wooded glens throw their music across the waters, rising, falling with the breeze ; the shores are densely clothed down to their gravelly margin with bushes of hazel and trees of gnarled oak, while behind them rise the heath-covered hills overshadowed by Voirlich's misty crest ; the gloom of dark Glenogle, fed by a hundred rills, leads us back to memory of happy days on Dochart and Strathfillan ; away to

the east, gleaming in the setting sun, lies the little village of St. Fillans, a pleasant place to rest.

Loch Earn appeals more to the artist than to the angler, for as a fishing water it bears no great character and little reputation, but in spite of all it is well worthy a visit and is decidedly capable of yielding quite satisfactory sport. Like all lochs, it has its good days and its bad days, and one of the former is a delight which will compensate for many less fortunate. He who must needs do great slaughter before he can enter into his joy had better go elsewhere, but he who can appreciate the pleasures that are not weighed or measured will here find them.

At a first glance the loch does not impress one as being a congenial haunt of trout, as the shores are very steep, there usually being but a yard or two of shallow followed by the sudden intense blackness that denotes depth; there is also an unfortunate scarcity of the reeds and weeds in which trout revel, and in which flies pass their larval state in their various activities. We may have been depressed on noting these characteristics and deficiencies, but it was only for a time, their only effect being that we set out on a voyage of exploration in search of feeding grounds. Nor was the expedition taken in vain, for we discovered several fairly large tracts of shallows and, better still, found them frequented by trout of agreeable size. Of these parts we mention only such as proved really productive, viz., Ample Bay and the Miller's Bay in the south-west corner, one on each side of the Ample mouth, and another very fine stretch, whose name we do not know, which lies immediately east of the Beich Point. The last we found quite accidentally one day when there was

seen a moderate hatch of Olives which the trout were taking greedily, and always thereafter we managed to secure a fish or two there when other places failed us. Of the St. Fillans end we cannot speak, as when we were in the humour to undertake longer journeys the breeze was always too strong to allow that being done. The Miller's Bay is really first class, easily the best stretch we know, long and broad, affording a whole day's fishing if necessary, and holding trout of a class superior to any we have found elsewhere in the loch.

The trout of Loch Earn have a style, peculiarly their own, of taking a fly, or rather we should say that we have never found trout in any other loch that acted as they do. Many a time have we watched them closely, but still we are unable to say precisely wherein the difference lies ; it would require exceedingly close observation, and many rises to the artificial fly in rapid succession—requirements both difficult to provide—before we could give definite conclusions. A vertical rise we never saw ; their customary mode of attack appears to consist of a horizontal lunge of a foot or more, and this is particularly noticeable when the floating fly is the lure used. We, however, find ourselves completely at a loss to describe the process in detail, and we wonder if others have observed this idiosyncrasy and can say exactly what it is. We do know that it requires the most minute attention and a ready answer to hook these fish, but then again in many cases they hooked themselves as we seemed often too late in striking. There seems to be no reason why trout in different lochs should not acquire special distinguishing characteristics in their manner

of rising, just as they develop peculiarities of form and colouration ; it may well be a consequence of the depth of the water they frequent.

There seemed to be a great lack of ephemeridæ, as except on one day, referred to above, we saw only isolated specimens ; but that may be unusual, and due only to the inclement weather, or perhaps they selected for their aerial adventures those days that we spent further afield. There was also no abundance of sedge-flies, but the evenings were so often cold and windy that we could hardly expect to see them in numbers.

We imagine that the wet-fly will prove the most killing lure and even it will probably show the best return when it is fished deep in the water. This means that fishing loses much of its interest, and becomes only an affair of continuous labour, as by far the most pleasing sport is obtained when trout are rising freely to the surface and taking the wet-fly high or sucking down the floating variety. Incessant casting, in the absence of natural rises, is apt to become monotonous, but it bears fruit ; and though fish be taken only at long intervals, the score mounts up.

On one particular day, for example, we actually caught and retained no fewer than nineteen trout of good average size ; not a rising trout was seen throughout the day, but it was our best day as regards numbers and aggregate weight, and at the same time the most tiresome we had. Truly the success of a fishing expedition is not always to be reckoned in pounds. Compare with that an hour we spent in the late evening beside the mouth of the Ample. The water was innocent of the slightest wind-caused ripple, but here and there the surface was broken by trout rising in that deadly fashion we long to see,

making that sucking sound we associate with weight. The boat had to be slowly and quietly backed to within casting distance of the spreading circles, and the oiled fly of corncrake wing was laid as neatly and gently as we could at their exact centre. Not every cast, by any means, was successful ; but in the short-lived opportunity six excellent trout, averaging half a pound, fell, and we rowed home contented in the failing light.

The loch is well-fished, nearly every house on the bank having a boat lying in front of it, and, although it extends to a length of seven miles, the fishing grounds form only a small fraction of the total area. Yet we cannot say that we found the trout unduly wary ; rather were they dour to rise, and on many days not a single break was to be seen. It was rather better always in the evening, but that, of course, is a general rule in most lochs during July. We were amazed and not a little disappointed to see the amount of night-fishing with the worm and other natural baits that was carried on from the banks—a more dull, uninteresting practice it would be difficult to imagine—but then we must conclude that some success attends these efforts, as otherwise they would, one would expect, gradually cease. A row of forked sticks planted along a loch side is nothing less than a disgusting spectacle, and indicates that education in the science and art of angling is not progressing very rapidly.

No one condescended to give us a hint as to the favourite sizes and patterns of flies, so that we had perforce to experiment a little before discovering these for ourselves. We have never formed any

great love for "fancy" patterns, usually the result of some idle moment; for dry-flies we attempt a close imitation of the natural insect, and for wet-flies we use a certain few, also copies of various creatures in which trout are interested, which have proved their worth in many waters. Small flies, even after lengthy trials, showed themselves to be vastly inferior to the ordinary standard Loch Leven size. Wings of teal and of woodcock are good here, as elsewhere, while the redoubtable Greenwell's Glory always merited its place on the cast. As a matter of fact, however, we never found the trout displaying any marked partiality for any one fly, so that they might have taken a "fancy" fly as readily as any other; if they were in the humour, they seemed ready to accept anything offered; if they were not, they would take nothing.

A few trout may be picked up by trolling with the minnow, natural or artificial, the former preferably, on the way to and from the selected fishing ground, and on one or two occasions we did make use of this method of assisting the fly-rod in the hope of securing a big fish, but the captures made were no better than those which fell to the more sporting lure. Sometimes, indeed, they were so diminutive that they had to be returned.

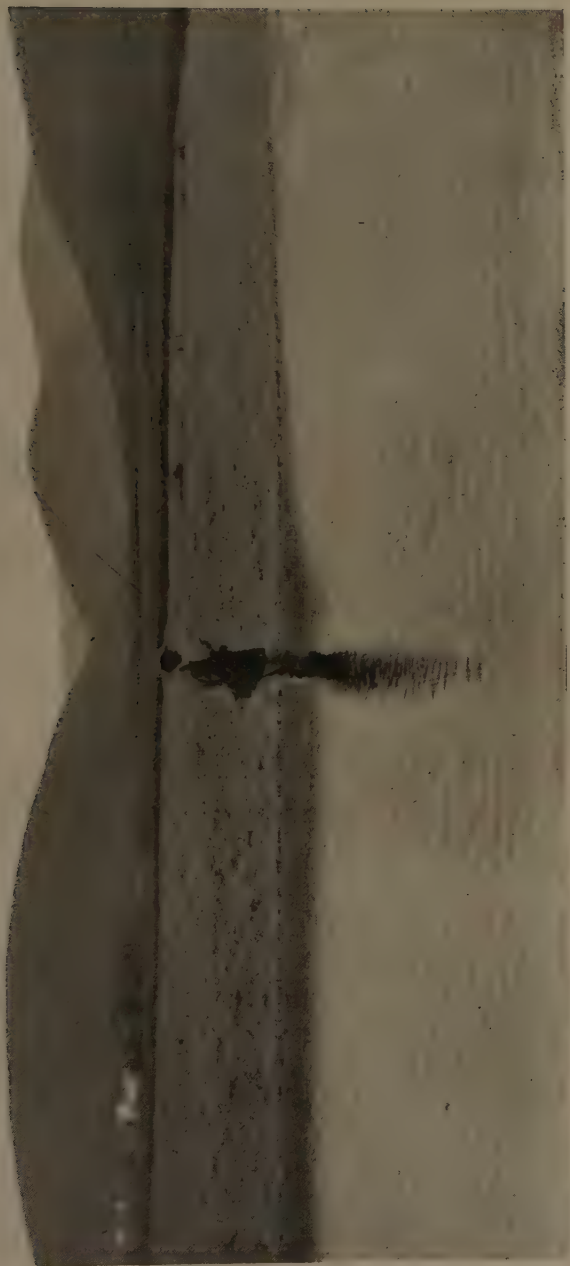
We find it rather difficult to become enthusiastic about Loch Earn in July, and if ever we return to it—and the prospect holds certainly many attractions—we shall select for the event, if choice is possible, a warm day in April or May when the wind blows gently from the west, and we are hopeful that, while we shall delight as before in the now familiar scenes around, the creel will press comfortingly on the shoulder.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CLYDE IN JULY

THE month of July is not the most profitable period of the trouting season, and is in consequence not likely to be the month chosen by anyone who is fortunate enough to be able to select the time for his annual serious onslaught on the wary trout. A feast of ephemeridæ in May, followed by a banquet of stone-flies in June, renders the trout somewhat lethargic in his movements and fastidious in his tastes. Nevertheless he who is condemned to take his holiday in July deserves and requires no sympathy, for there are certain districts where the trout's appetite seems to be always fairly good, and where a lure delicately presented is frequently accepted. The Clyde in its highest reaches is such a place, delightful centres from which to fish it being Crawford and Elvanfoot, the latter of which is to be preferred by the angler desirous of having a really peaceful holiday. While lower down the river in the favourite spring stretches between Thankerton and Lamington a little sport may always be had, away up in the open holms above Elvanfoot a good basket may be taken in full daylight almost any day during the whole month of July.

It is truly a most attractive country, not wild and



ON THE CLYDE IN JULY.

rugged, but silent save for the *susurrus*, the music of the river, the sighing of the breeze among the tall rushes of the holm, the hum of the mountain bee revelling amid the wild thyme. There the railway train leaves the Clyde valley to coast down the rocky Elvan water. The road winds along the hill, one branch to lose itself in the gloom of dark Dalveen, the other to cross the river and penetrate to the distant homes among the cleuchs and hopes of Daer. No trees or bushes shade the water, no rocks impede its flowing stream, and still all the variety of silent pool, smooth glide, and rippling shallow is there.

It is a land of birds; the meadow-pipit accompanies the angler in his hasty, eager walk from the dusty road to the water's edge; the cheery dipper delights him with its merry ways as he progresses up the bank; from every rush-clad corner a snipe zigzags away in headlong flight; occasionally a preying hawk from the woods of Allershaw or Newton is seen quartering the slopes. Trout are numerous, of good size, and fine condition. Every flat holds a large head of fish, and every deep, still pool holds at least one trout, the capture of which would make any angler proud. There are comparatively few fishermen, and on many days it is possible to find quite a long stretch entirely undisturbed.

The trout of these parts are, nevertheless, fairly well advanced in knowledge of all sorts of lures, but at times they feed boldly. A passing shepherd, unsympathetic, or a careless angler homeward bound, will put them down, but their courage is soon restored, and after a few minutes they rise as eagerly as before. The waters are usually crystal

clear, flowing as they do over a bed of golden gravel, so much so that to the angler whose eyes are trained in the art and who has learned to approach with caution the edge of the stream, the movements of feeding trout are plainly discernible.

It is well worth the angler's while to spend a day on the river unaccompanied by his rod, for he will learn much concerning the favourite feeding stations in a pool or flat, knowledge which tells the tale at the end of a day's fishing. He will mark down quite a number of superior fish, and each day when he approaches a fateful spot he will be all expectation as his fly floats invitingly over the prospective victim. Sooner or later he will hook one of them, and after the fight is over and the magnificent trout has breathed its last, his satisfaction will be complete. Others may, and very probably will, defy all his efforts to lure them, but the exercise is good, and anticipation constitutes the greater part of pleasure.

When the water is low and clear there is not the slightest doubt that in the month of July from the mouth of Elvan Water to Wintercleuch on Daer the dry-fly is the most effective lure the angler can employ. In fact that stretch might well be designated typical dry-fly water. If the wind has the slightest touch of north in it the whole stretch is available. Should the breeze be from the west the angler should confine his attentions to the lowest part—viz., from Elvan Water to the mouth of Little Clyde or to the highest reach—viz., from Daer Bridge upwards. An east wind suits the middle portion admirably, and there the very choicest pools and streams are situated. Of course these remarks

are intended for those anglers who find casting against a breeze beyond their capabilities.

On warm days the Black Midge and Red Quill are the favourite patterns, but on wet or breezy or cold days Greenwell's Glory and the little Iron Blue will do great execution. Hackled flies may also be employed with much profit, and some anglers use these exclusively and find themselves satisfied with results. In the evening again, when the breeze falls, the Red Quill should find a place on the cast, but later on, "twixt the gloamin' and the mirk," one of the sedges dressed with corncrake or pheasant wing should be substituted. If trout are rising the fly should as a general rule be cast to alight only a few inches beyond a trout; in fact as near it as possible, not, as is usually recommended, two or more feet beyond it, for the simple reason that Clyde trout are most remarkably gut-shy, and therefore as little as possible of it should be placed within their range of vision. Horse hair, of which trout are not so shy as they are of gut, may be used with advantage, but only by anglers who can strike with gentleness or who have the faculty of simply tightening on a fish. When rising trout are not in evidence the angler need not conclude that a change of lure is indicated, nor need he wait for the commencement of the rise. He may cast into the more promising places, and very often he will have some reward for his pains.

Every day he will probably capture one or two grayling, and, though in this month they are far from being in the height of condition, they will afford quite good sport provided that they are not bullied. They may be unceremoniously pulled

ashore as soon as hooked, but if they are given their first rush and treated gently they will fight almost as well as a trout. Their average weight is from half a pound up to a pound, and one outside these limits is really exceptional. They have become remarkably scarce beyond Daer Bridge, which may be due to the fact that otters are becoming more plentiful. At least that was the explanation given by a keeper, who in support of his opinion stated that he had shot three during one winter. Trout are not, however, scarce in the same stretch, but perhaps the otter finds the grayling more easy to capture than the nimble trout. In all likelihood the Black Midge will account for the majority of the grayling caught.

Even the most expert of dry-fly anglers will encounter some very difficult casts, where it will take all the skill of which he is possessed to circumvent the troublesome "drag," for the river takes some peculiar turns, forming dead backwaters here and there, and flows occasionally over thick patches of weed or past semi-submerged masses of the bank which have become detached.

The wet-fly, especially if fished upstream, will always be the means of bringing a few trout to the creel, but it will meet with most success in boisterous weather. There is no necessity for using more than three flies on the cast, and these should be dressed in the well-known Clyde style, wings split and set well back. A useful trio for a warm day would be the Froghopper, Red Spider, and Black Midge, while under other conditions Greenwell's Glory, Grouse Spider, and Iron Blue are recommended. In July sometimes there is a strong hatch-out of sand-

flies, and of course when this occurs one or more should be placed on the cast.

The visiting angler may be fortunate enough to see during his sojourn at Elvanfoot an expert in the use of the natural fly, and possibly the results of this deadly branch of the sport may be sufficient to persuade him to copy one of the masters in the art. The miners of Leadhills know both how to collect and how to use the natural insect. In July the "grey fly" is the favourite, though the blood-sucking cleg, the agile grasshopper, and various species of sedges are also frequently pressed into service. A single hook is usually used, on which the fly is impaled, while some adepts at the game fasten the fly to the hook with a speck of bird-lime. Armed with a rod of about 14 feet in length, the angler cautiously advances up the stream, taking advantage of every available bit of cover, or propels himself along the high bank with neither grace nor elegance, and allows his bait to touch the surface of the pool, where it wriggles in alluring fashion until seized by a fish. A second or two must be allowed to pass before the strike is administered. Considerable success attends such efforts, and the trout captured are, it must be admitted, invariably in the best of condition. The method does not, however, call for the exercise of much skill, and is not to be adopted by anglers who wish to get the most out of fishing. For the same reason night-fishing with the fly or minnow is not advocated, for, though at times it is undoubtedly productive of heavy baskets, it does not call for much thought or expertness, and it does not allow the health-giving recreation of angling to give what it is so eminently fitted to supply.

The expert in the use of the "clear-water worm" will find here some stretches which will appeal to him very strongly. From Crawford to Elvanfoot Bridge the water is ideal for the purpose, while Potrail and Daer are also eminently suitable and the sport may be pursued for miles without interruption.

CHAPTER XXII

ON LOCH KATRINE

IT lies beyond our power to describe adequately the surpassing beauties of the loveliest of Scottish lochs, but we claim to be as much affected by such magnificent surroundings as are those who have already succeeded in picturing the glorious prospect. Anglers are of all people the most likely to be influenced by beauty, for to them it is given to be intimate with the most wild and awe-inspiring grandeur as well as with the most delicately lovely scenes this country has to show, and anyone who has not yet visited Loch Katrine in quest of sport must seize the first opportunity that presents itself for making such a thoroughly enjoyable expedition. Others who already know it must often experience a great longing to be there again drifting between wooded islets, along steep, rocky shores, or across a curving bay.

Whether sport is forthcoming or awaiting—for either may be granted in any loch—matters little, because there always remains a scene of which the eye never tires, the wondrous gem of Ellen's Isle, the craggy Ben An, the towering Ben Venue, and the far gloomy peaks of dark Glen-gyle. We confess that there is an appearance

of artificiality here and there, the handiwork of man having intervened to alter the natural margins, but in spite of all embankments, piers, and painted marks, the loch remains a loch in every sense. The Silver Strand may now be submerged, but there are many other beaches of white, dazzling, glistening gravel to which the name might be worthily applied. The path still twines through groves of hazel, and the graceful foliage of the silver birch still waves in the breeze.

Out from the Trossachs we row, a company of five all told, disposed about the craft as follows :—two ladies occupy the stern, their allotted duty the guarding of two trolling rods, while facing them sits the skipper, whose pleasant task it is to attend generally to their entertainment and bait the flights; the keen and eager boatman takes the middle seat and settles down to a long day's work; we are perched as comfortably as possible in the bows, with fly-rod in readiness lest a trout should be seen to rise within our reach. That, however, proves to be a vain hope, for no such phenomenon occurs throughout the entire day; but a life of idleness is dull and tiresome, so that whenever possible we cast the flies as the boat progresses.

Surely that was a flash in the vicinity of our lure; a quick strike follows, and a screaming reel proves the surmise correct, and we find ourselves so fully occupied with our first Loch Katrine trout that we have no time to wonder what will be the fate of the minnows as the boat is stopped. The fight is keen and the issue uncertain, for we are using the finest of tackle, but care and patience finally triumph, and the skipper slips the net under as gallant a

trout as ever we captured. Though it boasts barely three-quarters of a pound, yet is he a worthy trophy, and puts us all in good humour, filling us with expectations of a good day's sport. We find he has succumbed to a Blae and Yellow, a favourite July pattern of ours on other lochs, and we are pleased to discover that it has so early done its duty on Katrine. We think all the more of our victim, for till now we have been none too hopeful of the day, it being dull and heavy, with mist on the hills, and only a fitful breeze from the east raising now and then a tiny ripple; not a fly-fishing day, it would appear, unless a good hatch-out occurs.

Now we find ourselves discussing in silence the probable state of the fly-life of these waters. It seems to us that owing to the extensive operations carried out here from time to time and the consequent alteration of the depths, the aquatic vegetation will have been very considerably disturbed, and the flies which spend within its shelter the earlier portion of their existence will have suffered some corresponding adverse change. Of course the various water-plants must select the depth which is most suited to their requirements, and as the level of the loch is raised they will retire nearer to the margin, but even there in many places the depth will be too great, so that great areas over which they used to flourish will now be totally untenanted. No doubt other areas will have become available, but it may be taken as a fact established that these changes in the distribution of weeds will be followed by an appreciable loss in the stock of water-born insects from which

recovery can be effected only after the lapse of time, and also that in turn will cause the trout to congregate in new stretches. When the sluices were built on Loch Leven there were no deleterious effects noticed on the fishing, so far as we know, but that is scarcely a parallel case, as in that loch the shores are low and flat, not precipitous as in Loch Katrine, and therefore both aquatic weeds and insects found a suitable habitat almost at once.

We are awakened from our theorising by the voice of the inshore trolling-reel ; the boat is kept steadily on its course lest the other minnow should foul the bottom ; the lucky rod is held aloft and the reel sings a merry tune, while with scant ceremony the hooked trout is wound in. When near the boat, however, it offers objection to this treatment and shows that it merits some slight degree of carefulness, but in spite of frantic leaps in the air and vigorous attempts to shake off the hooks it finally glides into the net. A fish well over a pound it proves to be, a trout of desirable size and excellent condition, and we regret that it should have been taken by such means. What a fine bit of sport it would have provided to a delicate fly-rod, but we have no time for these vain regrets for the other reel gives tongue. Truly this has a faint resemblance to sport, for the skipper is kept busily employed baiting the hooks and sending out the many yards of line.

We in the bow in course of time get another opportunity to ply our craft, but for long there is no reward, if we except two rises from trout which had no serious intentions. At last we enter a bay, lying beneath a wooded slope adorned with a beautifully situated house, and there our second

trout falls to the fly, again the deadly Blae and Yellow. The inshore minnow is attracting most attention by its gyrations, though both are acquitting themselves creditably, so much so that when we begin our row across to the chosen luncheon ground on the southern shore they are found to have accounted for no fewer than seven fine trout, while only two have fallen to the fly. On the way across we get a vigorous pull and a mighty fish breaks the water fifty yards astern, but, like all the really big ones, this specimen also escapes. No sooner, however, is the flight rebaited and sent out on its errand than it is taken by a lusty trout, which is safely and summarily pulled aboard.

We beach the boat, kindle a fire, and enjoy a delightful lunch while we learn from our able, willing boatman that we have landed on the shore of Grasahoile Bay, probably the most prolific bay in the whole loch, and one in which really excellent fly-fishing is to be enjoyed when conditions are favourable. That being so, we lose the minimum of time and re-embark; the trolling-rods are given a rest, and the skipper with his fly-rod operates from the stern. We work hard as we drift before a freshening breeze across this famous bay. We fish with care and hope at all angles to the wind and wave in a vain endeavour to discover which of all the various directions will prove the most successful. The trout aggravate us, for, though we succeed in raising quite a number, we fail utterly to hook them; they rise, but do not touch, and we know no greater irritation. We shorten line, determined to give the next trifier a warm reception. Almost at once up it comes,

and we strike hard and have a good time with a half-pounder foul-hooked on the tail-fly. In such circumstances it is worth trying, though without a great slice of luck it will never prove successful, and we do not feel at all guilty of illegality, but instead acquire a feeling of satisfaction in that we have circumvented one of these wily, annoying risers. The skipper also accounts for a nice trout, but no other success is ours while we complete the drift.

One of our great desires born of our short experience is to fish Grasahoile Bay thoroughly some day when the trout are rising well, for we are convinced that a glorious time is possible there. The bay is long and broad, of a grand average depth, with long grassy weeds here and there, and it would afford fishing which would suffice for a long day. Time permitted us to have only one drift, and the homeward journey began. The fly-rods were put out of harm's way, and the trolls prepared for the fray, but apparently the time of the take had passed, for only one trout was captured on the long way to the pier.

A natural minnow freshly caught or preserved in salt is immeasurably superior to any artificial lure, however cunningly designed, and it may be mounted on any one of the well-known flights. We have a decided preference for that known as the Clyde spinner, which consists essentially of a doubled wire soldered into one solid stem, fitted with the usual fins and hooks. It can be appreciably improved by the introduction of a small swivel at the head, which operation is readily performed by first melting off the solder. A wrapping of lead wire can then be wound round the stem and the whole

soldered up again. As to flies, the standard Loch Leven size and patterns will answer well, and we have not so far heard of any variety which is considered locally of especial deadliness.

The conclusion we come to is that Loch Katrine is well worthy of a visit from the angler, who will certainly not be disappointed or dissatisfied with his day, for, should the trout unfortunately prove dour to rise, he has the compensation of the marvellous ever-changing beauties that unfold continually before his gaze. Now an islet-studded bay claims his attention, now a craggy peak or boulder-strewn gorge meets his eyes, again a picturesque dwelling nestling in a glade of birch and hazel calls forth his admiration—in short, there is not an uninteresting moment in the day.

The best time to visit the loch is in the leafy month of June, when the trout are eager for both fly and minnow, and when the trees are in their freshest loveliness. The fish are of fine average size, in first-class condition, and full of fighting power. A really efficient boatman, such as we were fortunate enough to secure, one with a thorough knowledge of the bays and most fruitful stretches, is necessary, and we believe that quite a number are available. We would advise the taking of a trolling-rod along with the other impedimenta, for the good fishing grounds lie at a considerable distance from the starting-point, but we hope that its service will be confined to the journey there and back, and that a hearty rise of trout will be in progress when the angler arrives at his chosen bay.

CHAPTER XXIII

EVENING ON LOCH DOCHART

MANY anglers know the picturesque little loch at the head of Glen Dochart; most of them, who have cast a line over its prolific waters, have declared that from a fishing point of view it is a hopeless sheet, while a few, who know it well, alone understand its capabilities for yielding sport of a high order. Within easy reach of the populous industrial centres of Scotland, it is an ideal loch on which to spend a few days. A boat is absolutely necessary, a really good man at the oars is highly desirable, and in order to obtain the best results there should be only one angler in the boat. To the casual observer the prospects of good sport in this loch appear almost nil, as the water seems covered over with weeds. Certainly they are in great abundance, and a great source of annoyance to the boatman, especially in a high wind, but there are a few clear drifts of varying lengths, which are readily discovered.

It is frequently complained that the trout are of very meagre dimensions, averaging about five or six to the pound, but that will be found far from a true statement by anyone who fishes the loch at a suitable time and with the requisite tackle.

In the summer months, when waters are low, evening is the time to go in search of the nimble trout of Loch Dochart. Sheltered by lofty mountains to the south and by wooded craggy heights to the north, adorned with a historic rocky islet, the loch at all times forms a picture of surpassing beauty, but in the evening it makes another appeal to the angler, in that it is comparatively early in shadow. When the sun falls behind the western heights the peaks and higher slopes of Ben More and Stobinian are still bathed in brilliancy while the loch is enjoying a prolonged twilight.

A few words of information and advice may not be unwelcome to any stranger to these parts who purposes spending an evening on these troutful waters. Before setting sail, the angler should put up two rods, one with a cast of 3x gut fitted with three small flies, and we suggest as a killing combination Teal and Green, Woodcock or Blae and Quill, and the inevitable Greenwell's Glory. As a matter of fact, however, the type of wet-fly used is not really material, though we have at times found the trout showing preference for a fly with a yellow body, notably Woodcock and Yellow or Cinnamon and Gold. The other rod should be fitted with a well-fatted line and a cast tapering gradually from stout to 2x, and bearing about a yard apart two dry-flies, river-size. For the tail-fly we recommend a light Olive Quill, and as dropper a somewhat darker specimen of the same type, or a Greenwell, or perhaps a Red Quill. These are safe flies to use at any time, but of course the angler should be guided in his selection by the fly that actually is on the water.

Every evening, when conditions are such as would lead one to expect that sport would be forthcoming, e.g., when the atmosphere is mild and the breeze but gentle, there is always a strong rise of ephemeridæ, of varying shades, from the lightest Olive Dun to a very handsome type with dark red body. In the subimago stage these float on the surface, driven along by the breeze, and but few are left to look after the next generation. There is also frequently a hatch-out of small trichoptera, mainly very dark varieties, with wings almost black, but such do not seem to come in very great numbers, or perhaps they are not very much appreciated, for we have seldom seen trout rising to them.

Whatever lure the angler uses he will very soon have it made apparent that here if anywhere frequent casting is emphatically essential, for the trout take the fly the instant it alights on the water. Of course it is highly dangerous to make generalisations where trout fishing is under discussion, but we have never on any single occasion found that the bob-fly as usually worked is of the slightest use on Loch Dochart, and we are not guilty of coming to conclusions from an insufficient number of data. Very seldom indeed do we get a pull under water, so that we are convinced that the greater the number of casts made the greater will be the number of fish raised. The loch is shallow, or rather there is little water above the weeds, and the trout rise without hesitation, when they rise at all, and with amazing celerity. Quick striking is also very necessary, for these trout can take and reject a fly in a manner disconcerting to the most expert angler, perhaps,

however, accustomed to fish of more leisurely habits. A short line should therefore be used, and it is a great advantage to have only a gentle breeze behind one, so that the boat does not drift too quickly down to the rising trout. Should the wind be high, a large stone suspended over the windward side of the boat will assist materially in reducing the rate of the drift. The angler should also remain seated so as to render himself less conspicuous.

Whenever a trout is hooked it should be held firmly or it will dive into the submerged weeds, with the result that fish and fly and also time, perhaps valuable, may all be lost. For this reason it might pay best to fish with a single fly, and we have done so, having great sport sometimes by casting into clear spaces, however small, among the reeds. Very probably in this loch and others of a similar nature trout have their feeding stations among the weeds, just as they have on a river, for here they do not seem to roam about when feeding as they do on most lochs. This makes matters rather easier, for it is only necessary to cast the fly on the centre of the ring made by a rising fish. If this is done without mistake an answering ring should be the sequel.

When we arrived about 8 p.m. (summer time), on a July evening, a gentle breeze from the east was rippling the water, and we proceeded to propel the boat through a maze of weeds towards the entrance to the deep, slow winding river which connects Loch Dochart with Loch Nubhair. As we drifted slowly onwards from that point towards the Castle Island no fish were seen breaking the surface, but every now and then our patient casting of the wet-fly was

rewarded by a spluttering rise from a fingerling or more agreeably by a fine head-and-tail rise from a goodly trout, and by the time the drift was completed six beauties, averaging about a third of a pound each, graced the creel. When we reached the bed of reeds, which extend round the eastern extremity of the island, we instructed the boatman to row very slowly round it, and at a nice casting distance from the outer edge, where they are more thinly spread. This is a deadly spot, where we usually expect much, but on that occasion we secured only a brace similar to the others.

We had made quite an auspicious beginning, but the slight breeze died completely, and we decided to push the boat through the reeds to the broad but short drift that lies between the island and the south shore. Lying becalmed in the centre of that excellent stretch we awaited developments. About 10 p.m. the rise began in earnest, and, without moving from our position, we found it possible to cover several rising trout which seemed of such dimensions as would satisfy our standard. The other rod was now taken up, and carefully gauging the distance, we strove to place our tail-fly exactly and immediately over a rise. Any little disturbance of the water so caused was concealed or minimised by the boil made by the fish as it descended, and not infrequently it turned and rose again. Most of these trout were hooked, for, expecting the rise, we were ready to strike at once. The second fly came in useful occasionally when we overestimated the distance, but it is, of course, of most service when feeding fish are not in evidence. A stroke or two of the oars was sometimes required to put



CASTLE ISLAND, LOCH DOCHART.

us within reach of a fish, but we dispensed with rowing as much as possible.

The evening of which we speak was not an exceptional one, but such as may occur several times in the course of a month. What is most desired is that the wind should drop almost, if not quite altogether, for an absolutely calm evening is almost invariably accompanied by a strong hatch of flies and a display of energy on the part of the trout. Our basket that evening consisted of eighteen trout, weighing nearly seven pounds, almost uniform in size, which is a very fair result, considering that not more than two hours were spent in actual fishing. We have occasionally caught a trout in Loch Dochart which reached a pound or more in weight, and we have on very favourable days creeled three dozen or more fish, but for superior average specimens and for interesting sport a good evening in June or July is unsurpassed.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN WATERS ARE LOW

IT is almost certain that everyone who has written in praise of the glorious sport of angling has found it incumbent upon him to select at some time or other the above title. The reason is not far to seek, for, when the rivers are running low and clear, there are difficulties which try the staying powers of the most persevering angler, there is a fascination in the condition which appeals to the true sportsman, there are trials to endure and perchance triumphs to record.

When a few rainless weeks have passed, the river is liable to remain no longer beautiful ; the sparkling freshness of spring has gone, and though the vegetation is riotously luxuriant by the river's bank, the scent of meadow-sweet heavy on the air, though the golden mimulus burns with dazzling brilliancy, and the delicate blue of the forget-me-not is as sweet as ever, the river itself is dull and cries out for the refreshing rain. Each little rocky islet is surrounded with a pale unhealthy yellow mass of decaying weed, while with it the stagnant backwaters are entirely covered ; long strings of dark green swing to and fro at their moorings like some unclean monsters of the waters ; no trout breaks the surface even

though it be lavishly sprinkled with hosts of fallen midges. The angler finds his enormous stock of patience well-nigh exhausted, but there by the river you will find him day after day suffering from a plague of flies, tortured by the heat and unrewarded for his toil.

Occasionally a diminutive fingerling will seize his fly and promptly dive with it into a mass of green sliminess, teasing him into profanity and tearing from him a vow never to fish again, but next morning will see him hurrying towards the river-side eagerly putting up his rod as he goes, and evidently anxious to get the first of the pools and the torment. Anglers can understand it, and it is given only to them to understand. We have heard of one who after a long series of such days threw his rod into the centre of the deepest pool, but in the morning he was up betimes and fished it out, and thereafter indulged in a whole day's angling—again for nothing. The wayfarer passing along the road gives us his deepest sympathy; we neither need it nor want it. Once one of these watched for an hour from a bridge an angler fishing assiduously and without results, and then, unable to keep silence longer, asked him if he really did not think it all an awful waste of time. The angler in the traditional Scottish manner asked in turn if the observer's last hour had been profitably spent. It had of course, for he had learned the utter folly of fishing, whereat everyone rejoiced because there are rather too many fishers already.

No longer, however, do we spend these fruitless hours, for we have learned something about trout and their ways since these far-off days of such

experiences, and not only we, but many anglers, have given up looking for sport when and where it is impossible to have it. When waters are low fishing is more interesting than ever, and is not necessarily unproductive. We are compelled to go in search of new haunts, revisit old ones, or put into practice altered methods. It is when the prospect of sport on the river is hopeless, or nearly so, that we think again of the burns of our earliest days, cheery little streams tumbling down cascade upon cascade, forming bright bubbling pools too deep or too much disturbed by the falling water to enable weeds to obtain a hold.

Thither we go at break of day, feeling young again, joyfully ascending hills, crossing glens and gullies until on gaining the final crest we look down on the burn of our choice, threading its way, a silver streak, through the valley. Its music rises and falls as the breeze comes and goes, and we hasten to meet it, the friend of our youth, the scene of early conquests. We see again the pool below the fall where on one great day a veritable triumph was won in the shape of a gallant half-pounder, which rendered us proud for weeks, for in these days that was an overwhelming fish. At the end of the day, we remember, the seven dozen of smaller fry—we were bloodthirsty creatures then—were arranged in the basket, and on top of them all this giant among trout was placed, where it would catch the eye as the creel swung round, which of course it often did, though probably not always without assistance. Now we do not kill quite so many, for, though they are as numerous as ever, they are smaller, or so we try to deceive ourselves, but the fact is that the standard

has been raised. We even capture several half-pounders, and even one or two still better, but they are none of them quite so heavy or nearly so beautiful as the monster which fell many years ago.

The little pink worm is as deadly as of yore in the streams, and when placed close to a hollowed bank entices out a trout just as it always did. We forget at first, but suddenly remember, to strike and throw out a trout as soon as it turns to go back with its prize. Frequent loss of both fish and tackle, which resulted when the trout was allowed to get back to its holt, taught us long ago the advisability of this procedure. However deadly the worm is in these burns, we now discard it whenever a clear, unencumbered pool is reached, and instead we put up a floating fly merely for variety and to find out whether it will prove as fascinating here as on the river. A short line, an underhand cast, and considerable accuracy in direction are all demanded, and as the fly comes floating unsteadily down over a promising rise or likely spot we rejoice to see the gleam of a bar of gold as the trout takes down the fly. There is a wild fight as the nimble fish tears for the cover of the bank, then for the unseen boulders under the roar of the fall, but soon the record of the past is broken, and we wonder if we are pleased or not. A day on the burn is a great experience, brimful of happy memories, and the two or three dozen of trout, small though they be, are very gladly accepted by those who know and appreciate their delicacy.

We may not, however, be inclined for the somewhat arduous exercise entailed in crossing hills, scrambling

among rocks, and picking our way through trees and dense undergrowth, so, as we must of necessity fish, we may either remain faithful to the river or elect to have a lazy day on the loch. The river is at hand, and though unlovely here and there, we shall certainly find pools and flats which are comparatively, if not entirely, clear of the objectionable slimy green weed. The trout, however, are too lazy and well fed to accord more than a passing glance to a fly no matter how carefully it is floated over them; they await the passing of the drowsy hours of day and the coming of the cool evening when, for a few minutes or it might even be for an hour, they awake into life and liveliness and keep us busy. We may be well rewarded, or again we may be amply irritated; it all depends on the mood of the fish. Which of the two is experienced matters little, for both are good; the one satisfies, and the other sends us to look for solutions, gives us something to ponder over. A miniature Red Quill gnat is a dainty and deadly lure in the last hour of light; a small dark brown sedge is good, but a hackle-point spinner is our favourite, and the trout's as well. With a single specimen on the cast, we mark down a rising fish, as likely as not one that has defied for a week all our efforts to lure it, and studying the light, the breeze, the flow of the water, the approach and the delivery we lay the fly a few inches beyond the trout.

The fly, lit up by the sun's last rays, shows beautifully on the gently moving water and approaches the fateful spot at a slow and leisurely pace which makes us almost impatient. At last it has reached its goal and mysteriously disappears, a single

floating bell of air marking the place where it was. The line tightens to the strike, and the reel screams out as the hooked trout, wildly leaping, plunges for the shelter of a submerged mass of weed. Foiled in this it seeks the heavy water at the neck of the pool; again prevented, it tears off to the shallows at the tail, where lashing the water into foam it seeks in vain to throw out the barbed steel. Quieten- ing down it would fain remain at peace for a while, easing the strain, and in the clear water we see its myriad spots brilliant and sparkling, but the time for admiration of its beauties has not yet arrived, and we rouse it into active movement again. The reel protests, grudgingly yielding line, and presently sings out in triumph as it recovers it. The magni- ficent fish, now completely exhausted, floats be- tween us and the gravelly bank, and a steady scoop with the net lifts it out of the water and into safety. We wend our homeward way, the joy of contentment ours.

On a hot, windless day the loch can be much more trying than the river; the sun is merciless, and there is no shade; there is not even a single rise over the whole calm expanse to arouse within us the slightest desire to wield the rod. Again we wait until only the highest peaks of the hills are tipped with gold, and then we awake, and either afloat or ashore await the rise that will surely come. In that we can scarcely be disappointed, unless the chilling mist rises over all and sends us empty away. All around the boat the trout are feeding on a variety of flies, midges that have floated there unheeded all day, spent spinners that have made their last flight, sedges that have just commenced

their aerial life, and the trout are not particular which they take. Straight into the centre of the boil the fly is cast ; the spreading circular wavelets mask its falling, and up the unsuspecting trout comes again to accept another dainty. The disturbance of the water caused by his efforts to escape seems to have little effect on the other trout rising within reach, and they are there for the angler to raise and hook, to raise and miss, and often to fail to raise, immediately he is ready. This is fishing at its best, and we know no more interesting or exciting sport than stalking with the dry-fly good trout rising well in the evening on a loch innocent of the slightest ripple.

When waters are low we are not unhappy ; there may be fewer fish in the creel at the end of each expedition—though that is not a rule without exception—but each individual capture testifies to the expenditure of some thought and study and the possession of some luck, and gives us a measure of satisfaction not produced by greater numbers or heavier takes secured when conditions are more favourable.

CHAPTER XXV

A MOUNTAIN TARN

ON a certain memorable occasion we were accorded the privilege of a day's fishing on a little lochan in Central Perthshire—memorable mainly because such desirable pleasures come to us but seldom—and consequently we hailed with the greatest appreciation the opportunity thus afforded of trying new water. The preparations made were somewhat extensive, for we had very little idea what to expect, though a kindly native, who admitted having had a few unauthorised days on the loch, supplied the rather disconcerting information that the trout were few, large, and dour, and that they invariably preferred flies of generous size. Why flies of greater bulk than usual should appeal to certain loch trout never did seem to us to be capable of a satisfactory explanation, as the insects which frequent all waters seem very similar in size, but a single day's experience on Loch Lyon, for example, was sufficient to convince us that there are waters where proof of the validity of the statement is readily forthcoming. However, we did not neglect to take an assortment of lures with us, so as to be prepared for all emergencies.

The appointed day was not one which promised

much sport, being hot and calm, but we were as usual full of hope that conditions might have improved by the time we reached the tarn, which according to the map lay in a hollow of the hills about three miles distant from the road. With no guide but our own sense of direction, we left the dusty highway behind us and set our faces straight for the goal, determined that nothing would divert us from the course. We soon learned the impossibility of adhering to these resolutions, for we found the way plentifully strewn with difficulties quite invisible from a distance. Burns innumerable, quaking marshes, broad peat-holes full of intensely black water, huge rock-masses were all encountered, rendering frequent detours necessary. Nevertheless, we always contrived after varying intervals to get our landmarks in line behind us, and after an arduous hour's journey we finally reached the summit of the ridge, where we halted to rest and to view the surrounding country. To east and west we could see the long silver threads of rivers winding their course through sun-lit straths and piercing their way into gloomy glens; to the south lay well-known lochs we had left behind, and, when we turned to face our goal again, we viewed towards the romantic north the purpling mountains rising crest upon crest as far as eye could reach. The remainder of the journey was rather easier for we had passed the watershed, as evidenced by the numerous tiny trickles of water now hurrying northwards. Within a few minutes, having mounted a height to see what lay before us, we were agreeably surprised to find almost at our feet a beautiful sheet of water lying calm and still. It was easy to imagine that we were

in an unexplored country, that ours were the first feet to tread these shores, but on descending to the loch we almost at once discovered a boat complete with oars and rowlocks. It was, however, nearly full to the gunwale with water, but, ever hopeful, we decided that it was rain-water. With some difficulty the craft was tilted over until most of its contents were emptied into the loch, and a bailing-tin soon removed the remainder. Only one serious crack in the seams was made manifest, and that being filled up by means of a piece of the mooring rope, we put up the rod and set sail.

Being somewhat sceptical about the superiority of the large fly, and being influenced by the general hopelessness of the conditions, we selected four Loch Leven flies of ordinary size. The patterns chosen were Teal and Red, always a safe choice for the tail; March Brown, not at all unlike the moths that frequent the heather; Greenwell's Glory, probably a fair representation of any ephemeridæ likely to be familiar to the trout; and the Butcher, a general favourite as bob-fly. Almost at once a light breeze sprang up from the west, raising tiny wavelets and causing the tall reeds fringing the bays to wave gracefully. Our choice of fly seemed good, for before fishing had really begun a hard-fighting half-pounder was securely hooked and carefully brought to net. It was very dark coloured and in poor condition, but we kept it for luck, hoping that any others that came our way would prove to be in better health.

We had now arrived at the western shore, and laid on the boat to drift down the loch about ten yards out from the bank. The combination of

bright sunshine and meagre wind was not calculated to favour great execution, but after intervals of varying duration we would be rewarded and annoyed by a spluttering rise on the surface from a fingerling or a tiny "pluck" under water. A change to smaller flies seemed to be indicated and was justified by results, for before lunch-time had arrived they were the means of adding half a dozen good fish to the creel. These were somewhat fairer in complexion than our first victim, and were further distinguished from it by being in the very best of condition, boring deeply and strongly in the peat-tinted water or springing high into the air, as fancy suited them, and fighting gamely to the bitter end. We had learned some of the peculiarities of these trout—e.g., they never rose near the boat, seldom paid the slightest attention to the bob-fly, which is both unusual and unfortunate, but almost invariably took the tail-fly and that only when it was well sunk. In most cases there was no visible rise, only a sudden tug at the line to tell us that something was regarding the lures with favour.

From later experiences of the loch, and from information obtained from other anglers well acquainted with the place, whom we have since had the good fortune to meet, we conclude that such behaviour is characteristic of the trout there at all times, but on all lochs there are days when the fish will show the same disinclination to take a fly on the surface. Under such conditions it will generally be found possible to capture a few trout by using a long line, employing the underhand cast, keeping the flies outside the track of

the boat, and holding the rod-point so low that it just clears the waves. By these means the flies become well submerged, and are thus brought more closely to the trout's notice, thereby rendering sport more probable. Split-winged flies should not be used on such occasions, as, offering more resistance to the water, they take a much longer time to sink. If the water is deep or the breeze strong, then the rate of sinking should be accelerated, and this can be done by anointing the flies with glycerine or by wrapping the body of the tail-fly with lead foil, which of course may be had in various colours. The faster the rate of the drifting boat the more quickly must the angler draw his line through the water, but in a calm the flies should be allowed to sink nearly to the bottom of the loch, and then they should be raised not with a uniform motion but in short jerks, as they will thus resemble more or less various aquatic insects. These lessons learned on this remote mountain tarn have often proved of the greatest assistance to us when confronted with bad conditions on more frequented waters.

We ran the boat ashore on a small island covered thickly with heather, plentifully intermingled with blae-berries and cloud-berries, and there we partook of lunch. As we rested the weather changed. The sun was obscured from time to time by large clouds, a brisk breeze came from the north-west, and hopes mounting high once more, we launched our craft again. We elected to fish a long, narrow bay fringed on both sides with tall reeds; in fact, we had been reserving it in case conditions improved. We had already verified some of the remarks made

by the "local," e.g., trout did not appear to be at all plentiful, and they were decidedly dour, so we now decided to put the large-fly theory to the test. Close into the belt of reeds we cast, but sport was not in the slightest degree more brisk than before. Offers were still few and far between, and even these were half-hearted, so that we changed our cast again, and greater confidence—a valuable asset in angling—was restored. An improvement in results was at once noticeable, and one remarkable fact was made apparent. The trout were unquestionably dour; that is to say, difficult to raise to the fly. But they were not at all shy, for if one were persuaded to rise and missed, it almost invariably made a second and more determined effort. One was actually hooked at the third attempt, and strange to say, it was the best fish of the day, slightly over twelve ounces.

The wind died away again, the cooler atmosphere had induced a few flies to hatch out, trout were rising fairly well along the reeds and in the shallower parts of the bay, so by way of experiment we looked out a cast of 2x gut, and attached to it a single Greenwell's Glory of medium size and dressed to float. We considered it highly probable that this was the first occasion on which the dry-fly had been tried on this remote, inaccessible lochan, and that added a certain amount of interest to the attempt. The boat was rowed slowly against the very slight breeze from fifteen to twenty yards out from the edge of the reeds, and the fly was laid carefully on the centre of the ring made by every rising trout. Very seldom was it not taken, and we had occasionally

clear evidence that the loch contained really large trout, but, unfortunately, though they rose in apparently deadly fashion, not one of them was hooked. Most probably the reason lay in the fact that we were guilty of striking too soon, for a month's angling for quick-rising fish had developed that fault. However, the experiment was, apart from that, quite successful, for the dry-fly was the means of adding to the creel seven fine trout, all approaching half a pound in weight. It is quite possible that the wet-fly would have accounted for quite as many, and might even have brought to the net one or more of the larger trout, but a change of lure always has the effect of increasing our interest and our efforts.

We counted the spoils, nineteen fish, eight pounds, quite enough to add to the usual apparatus, considering the toilsome way that lay between us and home. Two subsequent visits under similar conditions produced sport of a very similar character, and we have not yet succeeded in landing one of the really big trout which cruise about the lonely tarn.

CHAPTER XXVI

ACROSS THE LOCH

A NGLERS being after all only human beings necessarily possess some of their characteristics and failings, and one of the chief of these is that they are rather prone to consider that whatever is far away must be very superior, whatever is obtainable only by dint of great exertion or at much expense must be infinitely more desirable than the easily procurable. Hence it is that they struggle laboriously over miles of mountain, moor, and fen, that they undertake cheerfully long journeys to inaccessible lochs and rivers only to find at the day's end that they, as far as actual sport is concerned, might quite as well have been within easy reach of home. Long may anglers continue to wander far afield, for, of course, participation is not their only joy, slaughter is not their sole aim and object. The climb to the hill loch or head waters of the river is of incalculable benefit, though during the process they may often find themselves regretting that they left the valley, and while sport may not come up to expectations still the effect is there. Besides, on the other hand, it may surpass all their fondest hopes, for such is the glorious uncertainty of fishing. Away up in these solitudes, far above the silent

villages, there are things to see in which the angler delights and which are unknown to the dweller in the plains. The hawk soars in the blue, floats, and stoops to kill ; the stag stands for a moment against the skyline ; the mountain hare pauses in its course ; a pair of ravens quarter the slope ; the teal leads her brood within the reeds.

We have lately had rather too many of these strenuous days, but still the failing cannot be entirely overcome, so, though it involves the curtailing of our fishing to a single hour, we elect to go across the loch, a long row against a heavy sea, while close beside us is a bay wherein we have often had glorious times, and hope to have again. We feel unfaithful to an old friend as we pull out in the teeth of a strong westerly breeze, but still we go. The air is warm and there is a promise that the wind will fall and give us comfortable and favourable conditions on the other side. A minnow revolves fifty yards behind the boat as it or another has done on perhaps twenty previous occasions, and if it does no good it does little harm. About half-way to our destination the reel sings out, causing us to wonder what has happened, and then we realise that a fish is on, something wonderful has occurred. This must be our lucky evening, and we stand up unsteadily in the tossing boat and quickly gain line ; we are careful, ordering the boatman to cease rowing, for we must not allow one of these infrequent opportunities to be lightly treated. By the time the line is reeled in the fish is well-nigh exhausted, and the net receives a dark-coloured but shapely trout of nearly a pound. A good beginning, we think, a fish for nothing, and we hurry the

more eagerly to our goal, the minnow spinning vainly.

Arriving we dismount the fortunate trolling-rod and put together two fly-rods, one for use with the wet-fly, while the other, a stiff ten-footer, is fitted with a reel containing a well-fatted line for dry-fly work, should the wind die away to a calm and the trout come well to the surface. Along the calm belt next the shore the ghillie rows gently and slowly while we search the edge of the wind. Small flies are considered most suitable for this game, as in the unruffled water the trouts' vision will be little obscured, besides which the depth is not great so that any fish, even not on the lookout, will certainly see them, but whether they will accept them is another matter. We are only, in any case, whiling away the time until the rise starts. A lively little trout seizes our tail-fly the moment it alights, but it can boast only eight inches, and consequently is returned sadder and wiser. Surely this belt is becoming broader; the wind is falling; the sun sinks behind the mountain tops; the very air seems to promise good things. A hoarse croak raises our eyes aloft and we watch a heron slowly flapping home after its day on the burn; we see it settle its ungainly form on a branch of a tree, whence it looks out on us like some evil spectre.

That was a rise out there; it is followed by another and yet another, and we allow the boat to drift into the ripple. Out from the stern there is a fine boil, and with an effort we cast our flies slightly upwind, and, as we bring them tripping across the wave, there is a glorious lunge at the bob. The rod bends to the strike, and the fish tears up to windward almost

on the surface ; the line cuts through the water, and the rush terminates in a wild leap. But we know the signs that foretell the coming of this ruse, and we do all we can do, and that is lower the point to take off the strain, hoping meanwhile that the hook is securely embedded in firm flesh. It is, and the fish comes towards us at great pace, faster indeed than we can recover line, passes below the boat in spite of us, tears off line again, and once more throws itself high in the air. Our luck, however, is in to-night, and still the hook holds. Such extraordinary exertions tell very soon, and the trout becomes quiet and docile, content or rather only able to bore deeply though still strongly, but presently that demands even more energy than it can now command, and it lies on the surface waiting for the net. At last it is hoisted aboard, a noble fish, a gallant fighter. We breathe freely once more, and for a moment or two admire his comeliness and condition. We put him down at one and a half pounds at the very least, and hand him over to the boatman's attention, for in his struggles he has wound the cast around him, and it will take time and patience to effect the unravelling of disorder.

We take up the other rod, attach a strong cast bearing two sedges of corncrake wing, and scan the surface for a rise. One there is rather far off and in our eagerness we order the boatman to remove the entangled mass, lay it aside for attention later, and get the oars going again. The fish rises once more in the same place—no cruiser this, wandering about sucking down fluttering sedges, but a steady, home-loving trout. That makes it easier for us, and our fly alights precisely where he abides, or

rather where he abode, for now his own special clump of weeds knows him no more. It is such a suitable site, fit dwelling for another pounder, that very probably during the battle it is taken over by another tenant, whose acquaintance we may make to-morrow.

The sedges are out in droves, actually becoming a nuisance, crawling over face and neck, decidedly uncomfortable. If they would only stay on the water, skating about until attended to by a trout, our sport would be the greater, but it is certainly good enough already. We cannot complain, for numerous chances are given us, and though we make a mistake with some, we do not find all the trout equally saucy and heedless of the attractions of our floating corncrake. Some of these flies about will be more closely imitated by a pheasant wing, and we promptly substitute one for the tail-fly. This is followed by an immediate success, a half-pounder, a small fish comparatively to-night, but welcome beyond all measure at many another time. And so the sport progresses, never flagging, for the trout are rising freely all around, so that it is nearly always possible to cover a rise, and sometimes we are in the happy position of having to decide which of three or four close together, and all simultaneously within reach, shall have the honour. The best first is the rule, but the determination of the best is sometimes not easy and often doubtlessly we are wrong in our selection. That matters little, for only the good fish are about to-night. Moreover, if one does prove irresponsive there is yet time to try another before the betraying rings die altogether away, and so the boat becomes more and more lavishly adorned with magnificent trout.

And now darkness falls over the waters, the wind fades away, but still the flies blunder about in the boat, on ourselves, and on the bay, and the fish are feasting royally. No longer can we see our fly floating, but that matters not the slightest, for we know from experience how far off and in what direction it lies, and somehow or other—we hardly know how—we are made aware of a trout taking it. We intended being home by this time, but how can we leave such opportunities behind? We never had quite so good a time before, and possibly we may never have such another, so let the sport continue.

The perpetual casting and drying of the fly is beginning to tell, and reluctantly we turn to the other rod for a change and proceed to search the calm with a cast of three Clyde night-flies. The boatman knows the tactics for this sport, working his boat with a slow, deep stroke now and then, giving it a deft touch with right or left when required, and knowing his skill we leave him alone. A tight line is our chief aim, as it enables us to answer the slightest touch. The eerie silence of the dark loch, broken only by the plunging of some great trout, fills us with excitement, as we feel that any moment the stillness will be rent by the music of the reel. Nor have we long to wait for that event; the progress of the line is quietly, almost imperceptibly stopped, and as we strike, we feel a solid resistance. Sounding as soon as hooked, the fish bores about the bottom, and we fear the result, as there may be dangers there in the shape of weeds or sunken trees. It is a tremendous strain the light rod has to suffer, but it comes well out of the trying ordeal, and, gradually gaining the upper hand, it brings up the

exhausted trout to view. We must wait until the dawning of another day before we can admire and fully appreciate his beauty, but his death seems to have been the signal agreed upon by the fates that would mean the end of our sport, for though we wait for a time the surface is not again disturbed.

Satisfied exceedingly, we row home across the silent loch in the company of the finest basket of trout that it has ever been our fortune to take in such limited time. We grope along the shore, seeking for our landing-stage, and finding it at last, we shoulder joyfully the comfortable burden.

CHAPTER XXVII

A MOORLAND STREAM

TO many an angler the above title will bring back pleasant memories, remarkable days full of enjoyment on the breezy upland moors far from the busy haunts of men. It will recall the wild whistle of the lone curlew, cheering music to the dweller in crowded city: the deep, black pool where at the foaming neck the silver sea trout launched itself on the feathered lure and fought in vain for liberty. To us it means a lonely stream, winding through a wide strath in the southern uplands, bordered by smoothly rounded grass-covered hills, where no sound is heard save that of the murmuring waters, the song of the moorland birds, the sighing of the wind amongst reeds and rushes. Perched on the green slopes are widely separated whitewashed cottages that gleam brightly in the sun, each with its front of darker green which marks the labour of the herd's leisure moments.

A little schoolhouse, too, stands beside a tributary burn, and at the midday interval, when we also rest for lunch, we hear the voices of the bairns raised in enjoyment of their release from the class-room. They have their experiences there in winter, when, owing to a severe snowstorm, pathways are blocked

and landmarks are lost to view within an hour or two; they sometimes have to spend a night or more under the care of the motherly schoolmistress, who must needs be always well provided against such a contingency. On the contrary, however, from the same cause they not infrequently obtain a few unexpected holidays, which are never unwelcome to youthful hearts. To them in summer the burn is a never-failing attraction, and after a spate few trout migrating from the river fail to escape their nimble hands. They also could show you where the grey-wagtail has its nest and where the white-breasted dipper, that accompanies you up the bank, rears its young. They could point out the trail of the otter and tell you the lair of the big trout which has defied it so long. In a few minutes a bell calls them back to work and its wonted peace reigns once more over the moor.

To the angler the stream makes immediate appeal, for its character is ever varying and always looks promising of sport. First we meet a long, slumbering deep pool which raises hopes of yielding a veritable monarch for the creel, but such places are usually disappointing to the fly-fisher, and as a rule we pass it after a searching glance for rising fish or at most cast over it in half-hearted fashion. Certainly some large trout reside within its black depths, and occasionally one falls to a well-spun minnow or to the worm in yellow spate. Leading into this pool is a broad gravelly shallow, affording glorious sport to the dry-fly in a brisk upstream breeze or to the big corncrake or Teal and Yellow when the surrounding hills are lost in the gloom of night. At the next corner we find a rough boulder-strewn

stream, where in the beginning of June the stone-fly does great execution and where the clear-water worm thereafter continues the slaughter. A strong deep glide next claims more than passing attention, for here a fighting, tumbling grayling is almost certain to suck down our floating fly.

Our favourite stretch now appears. The river is here condensed into a very peculiar pool, long and narrow, not more than five yards in width: it is also very deep and slow, and the banks are very much undermined. It is an absolutely perfect bit of dry-fly water, comparable only to a stretch of the classic Test. It must be approached with caution, and the greatest care must be exercised when treading these hollowed banks, so that the numerous inhabitants of the pool may not be alarmed by the concussion which may be communicated to the water. Here we like to find the gentlest of breezes slightly ruffling the surface and then, having put up a single dry-fly, we try to curb our impatience until we see a trout break the surface. It requires all attention, too, to detect a rise, for in that still water the trout, all of them of agreeable proportions, have acquired the faculty of taking down a fly almost without betraying their presence. The waters are disturbed by the smallest of dimples, and a bell of air may be left to show where a fly had been a moment before. From the reclining position, more or less graceful, which the circumstances demand, it is not easy to deliver the fly with the requisite delicacy, but sometimes the fates are kind and the lure falls lightly as a snowflake exactly where required. A twitch of the wrist follows the fly's disappearance, a goodly trout leaps into the air, and the pliant rod bends like a bow as the quarry

dives with lightning rapidity for the depths beneath the overhanging bank. Frustrated in the attempt, he bolts for the opposite bank, and again foiled he essays a rush upstream, but all his wiles are in vain, and the fight is finished in midwater. Gradually he is quietly worked to the net and lifted out on the bank, a gallant pounder, perfect in its symmetrical comeliness.

In this pool dwelt a trout, and probably it dwells there still, which excited all our covetous desires, for it was a magnificent specimen, weighing between three and four pounds. Usually it scorned to dine on flies, but nightly made excursions to the tail of the pool or to the shallow flat above to satisfy its hearty appetite with a dish of minnows. Occasionally it would deign to accept a large sedge-fly or night-moth, and once we actually succeeded in "rising" it, but after a few exciting seconds the hold gave way. Many unhappy experiences of this kind lead us to the conclusion that these large trout are somewhat aged and have very hard mouths, which hooks fail to penetrate sufficiently to hold. The theory at any rate serves to help us bear more calmly our numerous defeats.

Farther on the river partakes more of the character of a mountain stream, where our favourite method is not so practicable, but there is still one stretch we always like to visit, a rocky part where there are some narrow, smooth, gliding channels between ledges of rock. Here smaller trout are encountered, but they are game, and fight with all the pluck that their strenuous life encourages and bestows.

Principally we delight to live over again a most auspicious week, during which we creeled in five

outings no fewer than 150 trout, aggregating 63 lb. Such a basket is all the more remarkable when it is stated that this moorland stream is not a preserved water, but, on the contrary, free to all, and fished every day of the season by both local and visiting anglers. The explanation lies in the fact that throughout the whole week the water was in absolutely perfect condition. A deluge of rain had fallen continuously for thirty-six hours, sweeping out from the bed of the river masses of weed that had been accumulating for many weeks, rendering everything pure and sweet again, and stirring up the trout into a taking humour that is too seldom our fortune to meet. The ugly yellowness of the flood had soon disappeared, even before the rain had ceased to fall, the villagers, worm-fishing, had had their innings and had departed satisfied; and then the water had assumed that black colour shading to amber in the thinner shallows for which we so often sigh. Otherwise such a number and such a fine average weight could never have been had. Moreover, the take each day was limited by the capacity of the creel, for operations were discontinued always long before the trout had ceased to take. All these fish were taken on the dry-fly, not that we scorn other methods, but because that was the lure that circumstances seemed to indicate would prove most successful.

During the week of which we speak we met other anglers trying other lures, chiefly worm and minnow, but while they were having some measure of success, they were not having sport in any way comparable to that which was being obtained by the use of the floating fly. On the first

day the trout were feeding close into the edges, actually sometimes over submerged tufts of grass, but gradually, as the week progressed, they moved into their usual clear-water haunts.

On ordinary occasions, when the stream is at its usual summer level, we have had good times with all sorts of lures, but during the day, unless in a high wind, or in wet, stormy weather, we have never found the wet-fly productive of sport. The few trout caught are of rather meagre size very unlike their brethren which fall to the seductive powers of the floating variety. Natural baits of all kinds are used at their respective seasons with considerable success, but of these the stone-fly or its larva, the creeper, stands *facile princeps*. Night-fishing in the long, gravelly shallows will often produce large baskets, but it is a somewhat uncertain sport and now we are not easily prevailed upon to indulge in it.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MEMORIES OF ISLAY

THE angler who has not visited the Island of Islay in pursuit of the trout has neglected one of the finest opportunities for interesting sport that the country affords. The basket may not be phenomenally large, but a fair measure of sport is always assured ; seasons can be good and bad there as elsewhere ; the trout are not invariably keen and eager, but an utterly blank day is a thing unknown and even unthinkable. Lochs are numerous, many of them easily accessible, and consequently fishing does not entail so great an expenditure of energy that the benefits are counteracted.

We have spent many happy days on four lochs lying within easy reach of Ballygrant, a little roadside village four miles distant from Port Askaig, on the wild Sound of Islay. All our visits, four in number, have been made in the month of July, when weather conditions are often inimical to success, but nevertheless our results pleased us exceedingly, being infinitely superior to any we had previously known, and yet we believe that they will not bear comparison with those obtainable in May and June. The rivers, which can on occasions furnish excellent sea-trout fishing, are strictly preserved, and

we were given to understand that it was needless to make application for the privilege of testing them.

The voyage to Islay may be highly enjoyable and the run down West Loch Tarbert is exceptional if it does not provide some noteworthy episode. For example, on one occasion our progress was stopped to allow us to take aboard from a ferry-boat waiting in our course a family of tinkers complete with all their household gods. The quartette of bairns perched high on one of the seats, feet dangling in mid-air, was a fine concrete example of an arithmetical progression of which the common difference was approximately three inches. The boat, caught astern by a rolling wave, took an unexpected lurch forward, bumped into the steamer, and the nice little row was rudely disturbed, while wailing cries arose from amid the pots and pans. Truly it is a dangerous thing to allow one's centre of suspension to come beneath one's centre of gravity, and we thought with Sir Isaac Newton how true it is that everybody perseveres in his state of rest unless he be compelled by external impelled force to change that state. Order was soon restored and the transference effected without further mishap. Interruptions of a similar nature are numerous on this part of the journey, but no one desires to hurry through the magnificence that lies around. Brawling mountain torrents foam down the hazel-shaded glens, but here and there they rest awhile in deep, dark pools from which we have many a time lured the plucky little burn-trout and the silvery sea-trout. On leaving West Loch Tarbert the boat heads for Jura, a wild mountainous island where there is plenty of fishing to be had if

one possesses the necessary permission and the requisite energy. Working its way out from Small Isles, it swings round into the eerie Sound of Islay, prepared to fight or ready to take advantage of the seven-knot tide that roars past the rock-bound shores. In a short time or long, as the tide decrees, we reach Port Askaig in Islay, the land of the beautiful trout.

If he makes Ballygrant his headquarters, where is a modest yet comfortable inn, the angler will devote the major portion of his time to Loch Lossit, a lovely little sheet of water little more than a mile away. It is wooded for rather less than half its circumference, which is pierced by a few particularly fine bays bordered by belts of very tall reeds. In the centre a little tree-covered islet, somewhat artificial in appearance, is conspicuous, and in the evening it forms the resting-place of incredible numbers of clamorous rooks which spend their days upon the moors. On the way to the loch stands the keeper's house, and from the kennels near by a noisy welcome is accorded to every visitor. Here used to be reared many wild duck which were trained to associate the advent of food with the sound of a post-horn. Later in the year they were liberated, and for a time at least they would return on hearing the call, but instead of food they received on arrival a shower of lead.

The trout in this loch are numerous, beautifully marked and modelled, decidedly pink in the flesh, free-rising as a rule, and they are capable of yielding excellent sport on the delicate tackle which is advisable though not quite essential. They do not run large, one over three-quarters of a pound being exceptional, but the average weight is good, being generally three,

and on remarkably good days even two to the pound. The largest basket we have taken on it totalled twenty-three, but the prettiest lot that ever fell to our fly on Lossit or any other loch numbered sixteen, weighing exactly eight pounds, and we completely failed to find the slightest difference in favour of any one of them. They might all have been born on the same day and have enjoyed the same amount of health and the same quantity and quality of food throughout their lives. These figures will probably appear very insignificant to others who have fished Loch Lossit, but we find them highly satisfactory, and give them merely to show what can reasonably be expected under July conditions. An event of no infrequent occurrence is to hook and land two half-pounders at one and the same cast, and no better sport could we ask than this, for in such a case, especially with trout, which know few equals in agility, the issue is always doubtful.

The loch, like all others, takes some time to learn; there are some bays, one in particular, which are tenanted only by very small fish; while there are other parts, where large boulders strew the bottom, which shelter very fine trout, and these are not readily discovered by the visiting angler. Fly is the only lure possible. A luxurious growth of weeds, which do not reach the surface and do not in the slightest degree interfere with fly-fishing, renders the minnow useless, but that is no hardship, for the temptation to use it is seldom, if ever, present. The fly trailed behind the boat is more deadly here than we have found it on any other loch, and often in changing ground have we hooked two trout simultaneously by this means.

All the standard patterns of flies are effective, but by far the most killing in our experience was the Woodcock and Black, which resembles very closely the dark sedges which flutter around piers and bridges, wherever, in fact, old wood is found near water. The universally useful Butcher here adds to its reputation, and the large family of Teals should also have a representative on the cast. On calm days and evenings, even in the absence of a rise, the dry-fly laid quietly along the edge of the reeds is always certain to attract the attention of a roving trout.

One evening as we were lying becalmed on Lossit waiting for a breeze or, failing that, for the rise to commence, we were amazed to see an otter swimming towards the boat. Not until it was within oar's length did it seem to become aware of our presence, but, immediately it did so, it sank and reached the shore with one breath. The keeper informed us that he had been out at all times of the day and night watching for that otter and had never managed to get it within reach of his gun.

Every morning as we walked to Loch Lossit we used to cast greedy eyes on Loch Ballygrant, reputed to afford the finest fishing in the island, but we never had the pleasure of throwing a fly upon it. So densely surrounded is it with trees that it will probably fish really well only in a gale of wind.

Loch Scannistie is also within easy reach of the village, and on it we have spent some very pleasant evenings. The water on the western side is unapproachable owing to reeds and weeds, so that since no boat is provided fishing is confined to the opposite shore. Wading, however, is not necessary,

as deep water is found close up to the bank. The trout of Scannistie have no distinctive features, and it never was our fortune to encounter them displaying great eagerness for the fly, and, though undoubtedly some heavy specimens roam about, not one of them ever condescended to accept our offering. An hour spent casting quietly from the bank at setting sun was always repaid with a few handsome fish, but from various indications we received the impression that the loch must at times show far superior sport to anything we experienced. As the fishing area is so much restricted owing to the prevalence of weeds it will scarcely suffice for a day's outing, but it is a fine place to spend an evening hour after a hard day's work on Lossit.

A visit to Leathan—the broad loch—necessitates a journey which will occupy an hour or perhaps even more, according to the route selected, but amply is it repaid, not so much by a heavy creel—though that also is probable—as by the glorious silence that surrounds the moorland solitude. A race of trout inhabit the peat-tinted waters that are unlike any others we have seen; long in proportion to their girth, they are yet firm-fleshed and well fed, and all from the smallest to the heaviest exhibit this same striking characteristic; their sporting qualities are in no wise lacking, and one of our days there in which we killed seventeen fish remains clearly in our memory. Weeds are not so abundant as they are in the lochs previously mentioned, and we consider it an ideal place wherein to spin a minnow from a long-distance casting-reel. We desired very much to continue our walk as far as the Loch of the Tailless Trout, which alone would

make Islay famous among anglers, but the necessary guide could not be obtained, and hence we had to forego the pleasure.

We have had but a single day on Finlaggan, a loch of considerable historic interest, and misfortune proved to be particularly attentive to us throughout; the boat—barge would be a more applicable term—after nearly defying all our efforts to launch it was unwieldy and uncomfortable; the wind was fluky; calm, glassy patches studded the loch, and we wasted much time and energy chasing the fugitive breeze; we lost a very heavy fish through no fault of our own; we found trout rising steadily and greedily in one bay and were completely defeated by them; the creel at the end of the day showed only four fish, fine trout, however, all of them. In consequence we can come to no conclusions, but in spite of our limited experience, or perhaps because of it, we feel certain that Finlaggan is the abode of excellent trout, which will under favourable conditions come freely to the fly.

We now understand that we have been guilty of neglecting to take full advantage of the opportunities available in Islay, in that we have never visited Loch Gorm, the largest sheet of water in the island. Fishing on it is said to be comparatively easy to obtain, and it holds a very large stock of nimble half-pounders which are not too unwilling to accept a lure, even when presented by the inexperienced angler. We are, however, not without hope that some day we shall see Islay again, renew acquaintance with our old familiar friends, especially Loch Lossit, and also be introduced to Loch Gorm and possibly other troutful waters.

CHAPTER XXIX

UNDER CLOUDLESS SKIES

NOT the thinnest film of cloud floated in all the blue expanse, not the faintest breath of wind was stirring, when we reached the little reservoir on which we had been granted the privilege of a day's fishing. The long walk on a rough, hilly road had rendered us somewhat heated, and we were glad to lie deep in the thick shade of a plantation of fir-trees bordering the water until we had recovered somewhat. Before retiring to rest, however, we had put up the rod and laid an assortment of casts in the damper. The outlook was hopeless in the extreme, for the water was like a mirror, in which the breakwater and every surrounding rock and tree were reflected with surprising clearness. A few whistling grebes were dotted over the surface: in a bay coots chased each other as is their wont, and every now and then a great trout in the centre would rise with resounding splash, and lines of waves would come hastening towards the shore, but no breeze raised the slightest ripple to rouse us. It was certainly not a fishing day, but it had been with the greatest difficulty that we had obtained the necessary permit, and so, ever hopeful, we had made the journey.

A spinning-rod, patent casting-reel, and a minnow might have been the means of luring a goodly trout from the depths, but it was understood to be a "fly only" water, so we adhered to the regulations. However, we had to do something, so a cast was attached and the flies thrown out as far as possible, allowed to sink, and then drawn shorewards in every conceivable manner. Sometimes they were allowed to lie for at least five minutes before any forward motion was imparted to them, for this we have found to work wonders in other places under similar conditions; but all labour was in vain, and we became weary. Then we considered that perhaps a dry-fly with wings cocking daintily sitting on the surface might tempt a trout in a shallow bay, but though the line was carefully rubbed down and every precaution taken to make a good cast, all our efforts remained unrewarded.

We had perforce to declare ourselves beaten by the trout, and, laying the rod out of harm's way, we proceeded to explore the banks. Myriads of sedge-flies of various types and sizes sported about the edges of the water, doubtless making excellent provision for future generations; the stones bordering the loch were covered with the shucks of ephemeridæ that had reached the climax of their existence; the water in the little creeks and bays was absolutely covered with a floating mass of gnats and midges, and the air was so still that the sound made by the swarms of flying insects was clearly audible—but no trout partook of the banquet that lay spread out ready for their acceptance. As we walked along we flushed a meadow-pipit, and

presently discovered its nest, beautifully fashioned of delicate grasses and horse-hair, lying well concealed in the shelter of an overhanging tuft of grass, and containing six dark brown eggs. A coot's nest was seen out in the reeds, but was separated from us by a belt of water, so that closer inspection was denied us. Our thoughts were continually reverting to trout, and, owing to the plentiful supply of food available, it seemed to us reasonable to expect a general rise about sunset. It meant a long wait and the consumption of much tobacco, but to save a blank day we are willing to undergo great hardships.

When the sun sank at last in a blaze of splendour, the air became decidedly cooler, and the slightest suspicion of a breeze gently stirred the grasses, though it did not disturb the unbroken surface of the water. About forty yards out a trout rose quietly in that business-like manner we admire so much; in a minute there was another rise about five yards nearer the shore, and presently another. We know what this means, and it is something we really like. These rises were all made by the same trout, which had set out on a cruise of discovery, picking up the most succulent-looking morsels, not necessarily the largest, that happened to be situated on its route. Somewhat fearing that it would return to its starting-point without settling down to a little circular tour within casting distance, we took up the rod, which fortunately was perfectly prepared for the fray, and laid the Pale Olive as delicately as possible and as well as we could judge in the trout's orbit. The few seconds that should have sufficed for it to reach the fateful

spot seemed interminable, and we fully expected to see the trout rise some yards beyond, when up it came with the greatest confidence and sucked down the fly without hesitation. The reel skirled out its wild, cheering notes, music which we had not heard for many weary hours, and had almost despaired of hearing that day, as the fish tore off towards the centre of the loch, as if bent on throwing itself on the opposite shore. The pace and the weight of line began to tell, and, gradually slowing down, the fish turned to obtain a little less discomfort. The reel recovered most of what it had lost, when the trout made another bid for liberty by a wild spring into the air, always a point scored against the angler in the fight. However, the hook was well embedded and retained its hold, and the gallant trout presently showed momentarily on the surface. The end was approaching, and soon it lay safely on the shore. It was a magnificent specimen, in as perfect condition as ever trout was, and the spring-balance declared it to be exactly 1 lb. 8 oz., a fish well worth the long, tedious hours of waiting.

Encouraged by this success, we went prowling along the bank, eagerly watching for another "cruiser" or for a rise within reach, but we were given only one opportunity, which, owing to one cause or another, had not the same desirable sequel as the last. Possibly the trout was confining its attentions to drowned midges, or perhaps our own performance was more clumsy than before, but, whatever the reason, the fish ignored our fly and ceased to rise.

Dusk was now rapidly approaching, and sedges of

large size began to make their appearance, a few of them falling heavily on the water. Far out beyond our longest cast, trout of great proportions were now rising with great gusto and much splashing, and gradually they edged nearer to the shore, or possibly the inhabitants of the shallower waters were beginning to follow the example of their brethren of the deep. Our Pale Olive, which had earned its rest, was discarded in favour of a large Cinnamon Sedge, attached to a stronger cast, and that we laid over several promising rises, but in vain.

Owing to the failing light, it was impossible to see whether the trout were taking flies off the surface or showing themselves as they pursued shrimps and nymphs, but the latter seemed to be the more probable of the two possibilities when it was found that the dry-fly was persistently refused. A cast of three large night-flies was therefore selected, Teal and Yellow, March Brown, and the Butcher, and once more we cast the wet-fly, but with more hope than before, because every now and then it was possible to cover a feeding fish. After a few disappointments, due to refusals or unaccepted offers, we had the satisfaction of seeing a fine trout throwing itself upon the bob-fly. Its intentions had been serious, for without any answering strike it hooked itself firmly. At first it swam slowly round at the extreme end of its tether, angrily shaking its head from time to time, and then suddenly without warning it made a tremendous rush towards a bed of weeds about thirty yards away. In fear and trembling we at once, to ease the strain on the fish, lowered the point of the rod to the water. The plan worked admirably, the trout stopped

and came back, and we recovered line. There must have been low-lying weeds about, as we felt the other hooks catch once or twice, but the fates were kind, and these dangers were cleared by the trout itself. The battle was not yet over, for the same tactics were repeated three or four times, and we began to have fears of losing it after all. However, at one, and, as it proved, the final stage, the trout headed straight for the shore, and, helping it all we dared, we kept it on its course and pulled it straight into the net. It had furnished a most exciting bit of sport, which was not surprising, for when we had admired its proportions we discovered, not without the help of a match, its weight to be 2 lb. 2 oz.

Almost immediately thereafter the rise ceased entirely, and the surface of the reservoir remained absolutely undisturbed. We were not loth to go, for our lust for slaughter was satisfied, and we had a fair walk before us. We were thoroughly delighted, in fact, for it is not often our fortune to kill two such magnificent trout on the same evening.

So when skies are cloudless, sport need not be lacking, if one can have patience to wait until that fateful hour between the gloaming and the night when the sedge-flies fare forth and the big trout venture to cruise around.

CHAPTER XXX

ON THE CAIRN

LONGING again for the infinite variety of the river, we find our way to this sparkling stream of the south country. The village of Dunscore is our abiding place, a quiet sequestered nook in the midst of a rolling pastoral country, a solitude fit for the angler. The low-lying smoothly rounded hills, enclosed by the greater heights of the far distance, are cut into quadrilaterals of every conceivable shape and of every shade of green; the air is filled with the heavy perfume of the new-mown meadow hay; down the breeze is wafted the music of the river as we eagerly seek its banks on this August afternoon. This is no stream for him accustomed only to the smooth green sward or gravelly channel, the open bank and the unencumbered pool. Here angling demands an expenditure of much energy; the steep banks, heavily bushed, call for carefulness in casting, study of ways and methods. The long, rank growth of herbage, in which we flounder, is plentifully decorated with tall flowering plants, bedecked with heads specially designed or rather eminently fitted to catch and hold with tenacious grip the fly that has been allowed to droop too far behind.

A trout rises under the far bank, let us suppose—vain supposition in this thundery atmosphere—the line is lengthened, the alder tree is forgotten until a sudden resistance from behind sends the message that the cast is snugly entangled high in the branches. Athletic exercise is indulged in, the result of which may be the saving of a fly or its loss or worse, something undignified perhaps. What does it matter? It is all part of the day's sport, and if it does afford amusement to an onlooker, why should the angler grudge giving a little pleasure when he is receiving so much himself?

The Cairn is a fine stream, a great place for the spinner of minnows, a typical Scottish wet-fly water, with glorious bits when low and clear for the worm, but there are in addition some fine corners where the water slips gently along, eddying now and then, and there the floating fly is the perfect lure. Its trout are magnificent specimens of their race, short, thick, and golden, provided with a sufficient measure of wariness and with a power and will to fight that can, we think, be seldom excelled.

The Solway salmon, too, know it well, and on their journey up Nith turn in readily, but the sea-trout and herling seem to have but little love for it, and very few, unfortunately, enter. The explanation given locally is to the effect that this tributary has an outflow that is unattractive to these sport-giving fish, but, whatever be the reason, we should say that here is given a fine opportunity for an interesting, inexpensive experiment. If some of the few sea-trout were stripped at the spawning season, the ova hatched, and the fry turned into the stream or its feeders, then to such

an extent is the homing instinct of the fish developed that they would unerringly find their way back again from the estuary, and so there would in time be established, let us hope, an annual run. It may be asked why this has not been effected by natural means, but it would be difficult to say how many enemies the adult fish, the ova, and the fry have, and perhaps also a little unwise to investigate the question fully. The main fact of importance now is that only in insignificant numbers do sea-trout run the Cairn, and that is no reason why artificial assistance should not be given and an attempt at improvement made.

Our first afternoon on the river turned out to be an eventful one. We had been told by more than one sport-loving native the exact spot where a salmon was wont to lie, as well as the most likely time, viz., 3 p.m., that it might be induced to rise. Let us say at once that the inhabitants of Dunscore are the most sportsmanlike that it has been our fortune to meet, giving away such invaluable hints with the greatest readiness, and expressing the hope that we would succeed in "getting him," as they phrase it. Many people, no doubt, will know the pool immediately above the railway viaduct—at any rate that was the place indicated. The fourteen-foot rod, cane-built and steel-centred, was capable of covering the pool with the greatest ease, and we fished it down full of confidence produced by our information and by our Mallard and Yellow, so great a favourite on Loch Lomond and elsewhere as to seem worthy of a fair and first trial. The fact that the water, swollen by recent rains, was running slightly coloured, added to the feeling

of hopefulness, but the first trip down proved a complete blank, though we did enjoy the delightful action of the rod and the power it gave to lay the fly quietly and with delicate accuracy at the edge of the far bank.

We rested the pool for ten minutes, meanwhile wondering whether to try another pattern or wander further afield in search of better things. The former alternative was decided upon and we selected a Thunder and Lightning, being assisted to that conclusion by the fact that that handsome fly with the fiery hackle and the deadly touch of jungle-cock is the most killing of all varieties used on the River Wye. Why should it not be equally attractive on the Cairn? Not more than half a dozen casts had been made when the fly, hanging temptingly in mid-stream, was seized in no uncertain manner and the fish showed momentarily on the surface. We were fast in a salmon. Only an angler can know what that means. It immediately sank and sulked, but thanks to strong tackle, a stout rod, and a steady side-long pull it presently realised that it was hooked and began to move slowly, almost imperceptibly, upstream. Such tactics were not at all to our liking; we wanted to hear the reel skirling, to see the fish tear off at speed down, across or up the stream, to be thrilled by a succession of great lunges or violent leaps, but this fish belonged to the dour and stubborn order.

At last, however, we aroused him into energetic action, the fight waxed somewhat lively, and all the sensations that we had impatiently longed for were supplied in plenty. Now we began to turn our thoughts to the landing of the fish as it began

to show the preliminary signs of weakening, but chiefly because we happened to get a fine view of it in clear water by the edge, and the prize seemed greatly desirable. By the greatest of good luck two natives on fishing bent appeared upon the scene. One of them has lured many a Cairn salmon to its doom, and to him the gaff was entrusted, Selecting a favourable moment as soon as granted, he made no mistake, and the salmon lay securely on the grass. A beautiful specimen of fully eight pounds it proved to be, rather more than the average size for the water, and we felt proud of our success. Possibly the story is longer than the fish. That may be, but to us the killing of any salmon on the fly will always be an event worthy of being recorded, for such opportunities occur only at widely separated intervals.

We shall never lose our love for the sporting trout, but a day with the salmon-rod, culminating in the capture of a "fish," or even without that termination, constitutes the greatest of our present desires, so far as angling is concerned. The successful gaffer, almost as pleased as we were ourselves, appointed himself ghillie for the rest of the afternoon, sparing himself no pains in pointing out possible resting-places of other fish, but we had had sufficient reward for one day. The walk through the village to the hotel was of the nature of a triumphal procession, which, we are rather inclined to think, indicates that the death of a Cairn salmon is not an event of everyday occurrence.

In the evening we returned again to the river, but this time we carried the little ten-footer and a cast of finest drawn gut. To it we attached a

Medium Olive, as such were in sufficient numbers to attract some attention, and a Black Spider, the nearest approach we could find to a small black sedge, which the trout were sucking down joyfully. The part selected for the half-hour when the fates are kindest was a slow, deep pool known as Long John immediately above Dunscore Bridge, claimed to be the longest single span in the country. For a time, no matter how delicately we placed the floating fly a foot beyond a feeding trout, we received no response, and we began to wonder if the fish of the Cairn were different from all other trout we had encountered and could resist the fascinations of our favourite lure. That certainly appeared at first to be so, but, as the light failed slightly, we at last succeeded in raising a fish, which, however, managed to shake itself free. This was more promising, and we took pains over another hopeful rise, a long cast. The fish took the fly confidently, and finding itself hooked tore off downstream at a great rate, while we started in pursuit. After a good fight, marvellous for a fish under half a pound in weight, we slipped the net below and bore it aloft into safety. Another soon came to keep it company, both shapely fish, but then the rise ceased, and quietness descended once more upon the waters. We wended our way homewards, well content with our first day on the Cairn.

The following day, Sunday, was one of incessant rain, and the prospects for the morrow seemed of the brightest, but alas for our fondest hopes the river continued to rise all that day, doubtlessly owing to a heavier fall in the hills above Moniaive, and was in absolutely the worst fishing order imaginable.

Possibly the worm would have accounted for a number of trout, perhaps even a full creel, but fishing in a dirty, flooded water holds out no attractions for us, and we preferred to spend the time thinking over the past and making preparations for the future. The day was blank entirely, but that is not the hardship that some consider it must be.

Our next visit proved eventful also, even as the first. The water was in fair order, and we went out gleefully, salmon-rod, gaff, and a box of casts and flies our only equipment. Again we proceeded to search our generous pool, but we had not taken more than a few casts across the fateful spot when we heard, not the plunge of a salmon to our fly, but the loud baying of hounds in the distance. We did not know at first what this meant, but very soon two otter-hounds, leaders of the pack, appeared, eagerly searching the banks and bushes that overhung the stream. Fishing was entirely suspended, the apparatus stowed away in safe hiding, and off we went to view the hunt, for never before have we been privileged to witness this branch of sport. We longed to see the bold marauder who fishes for sport as well as for food, but that pleasure was withheld, as he reached his sanctuary within the entangled roots of an alder from which all efforts to evict him proved unavailing.

An hour's digging among stones and roots did not strike us as being in any way superior to fly-fishing without results, and we acquired an increased respect for our own special form of amusement. We were compelled to admire, however, the hardihood and keenness exhibited by the members of the Hunt, men and women alike, in fording the strong, deep-flowing

river, the intelligence and superb condition of the hounds, and the pluck of the little terriers. We fancy that otter-hunting will be enjoyable only when it results in the death of the quarry, and that the success of the day varies directly with the number of victims; the same has been said of salmon fishing, but we have had too few experiences of it to agree or disagree on the point; we do know, however, that the most enjoyable days spent amongst the trout are not those days at the end of which the creel has been filled to overflowing.

We had still another day, but the river was not at all in order for the salmon-fly, though of course we persisted for a time, even in the face of certain defeat. A trout was seen to rise, the salmon-rod was laid aside, and the little one, fortunately also carried that day, mounted in record time. The trout, a fine half-pounder, succumbed to the floating Blae and Black, and two others in rapid succession promptly joined it before it was time to cease work for the day.

After our short experience of the Cairn, from information gleaned from those who fish it almost daily, and from a study of the nature of the stream and its surroundings, we have come to certain conclusions regarding it, and offer some advice to those who either already know it only slightly or hope to visit it.

We had the pleasure of inspecting some trout-flies dressed locally, and while we admit that they were exceedingly well tied we observed that the favourite patterns all possessed the same characteristics. They are entitled to be considered favourites only because, being always used on the cast,

they kill fish, while other flies, which would prove far more deadly, are seldom, if ever, used. The influence of the sea-trout fly was to be seen in nearly every one of them; that is to say, they were dressed with mixed wing or mixed body or both. The Cairn is not a sea-trout river, and while these fish will take trout-flies quite as well as these fancy patterns, sizeable river-trout will not take, except at night, and only to a small degree even then, those brighter confections which are calculated to arouse the interest of the sea-going fish. A trout-fly should be at least an attempt at an imitation of a natural insect or other form of life which appeals to trout, and the better the imitation the more deadly must it prove. For night-fishing the flies should be a copy of the various sedges, known on all waters, and these, we are perfectly certain, will prove of far greater service than the others of which we have spoken. Those who go in quest of trout in the day-light hours should use hackled flies and imitations of the several duns and other insects of aquatic origin. In July and August fishing with the wet-fly is never profitable in southern streams unless in the black water which follows a flood or on a coarse, blustering day of wind and rain, and therefore, as the angler must fish even in these months, he should adopt some other means to fill his creel.

Of these other lures there are many, and each has its own suitable and appropriate time. When waters are at their lowest summer level, then the angler should be early on the banks of the Cairn, equipped with waders, rod, free-running reel well filled with a light waterproof silk line, and a bag of small

scoured worms. He should pass by the deeper portions of a pool, fish only the swift-flowing water at the tail and neck, and the shallow connecting streams. Using a short line only slightly, if at all, longer than the rod, and wading as deeply as possible or otherwise concealing his presence, he should face upstream and place the bait lightly on the water in front of him. Sinkers of any kind should on no account be used. Sport of the very best can thus be got usually in the early morning, and it is even possible to have quite satisfactory results throughout the day. If he is careful in his movements he will hook fine trout in the very thinnest water.

The natural minnow of small size mounted on some inconspicuous flight, attached to a fine trace bearing two diminutive swivels, will likewise prove attractive to numbers of good trout. A special rod and spinning reel designed for long casting will be entirely out of place on the Cairn, and will prove a serious handicap, whereas on other and broader waters they are essential. The ordinary rod used for bait fishing of any sort will serve the purpose admirably. The angler must now study the art of making himself invisible, most difficult when minnow is the lure, for usually the cast will require to be made downstream, but the trees, bushes, and long grass which interfere so much with his fly-fishing will now prove of the utmost service to him. Taking advantage of the cover they afford, let him spin his minnow neatly past all likely places, especially under trees or alongside stones, rocks, or semi-submerged bunches of weed. If there should be no response when the minnow passes a place where he knows or feels certain a trout is lying, then let

him repeat the cast, but at this attempt as the bait passes the holt he should give it a vigorous jerk. No matter how fast he may be, the trout will be even quicker than he, but of course he must take care not to bring the minnow to the surface during the process. No more valuable tip to the minnow-fisher can be given, but, again, it is useful only when trout are in the very height of their condition.

Certainly if we ever find ourselves on this sporting stream again in the unprofitable season we shall be prevailed upon, if salmon are not about, to use the natural fly—the cleg and daddy-long-legs, for example. The bushes afford excellent shelter from which to practise this exciting branch of sport, exciting because it is often possible to see the trout which we hope to catch ; it is difficult to keep the rod steady when the fish rises slowly, mouth wide open, and gulps down the struggling fly. The results are good, sometimes too good ; in fact, the use of this lure is justifiable only when all else fails. Before using it, therefore, we would have to call upon the floating artificial fly to do its best for us, but places really suitable for its use are few and far between.

The Cairn is in many respects a delightful stream, but August is certainly the worst month of the whole season. We saw and learned sufficient to make us desire to revisit it in May, and again in October, when the salmon come up from the sea full of vigour and keen to snatch the feathered lure that is properly brought before their notice.

CHAPTER XXXI

A SEPTEMBER DAY

A NIGHT of drenching rain, a touch of frost in the morning, a clear cloud-flecked sky, a mere breath of westerly wind ! Dare we be hopeful of the prospects of our day by the braes of bonnie Doon ? Certainly we may, for we are anglers, and hope it is that ever leads us forth. The air is chill on Fenwick Moor, but the car purrs contentedly along, devouring the miles and bringing us in good time to our journey's end, the scene of our labours, to victory or defeat. Whatever is held in store for us matters little ; the entrancing beauty of the scene is more than sufficient enjoyment ; here may one know the pleasure of living. We tread through the long dewy grass of a magnificent park, encircled by lofty spreading trees brushed with the first autumnal tints. In front lies our goal, the winding river, whose music already falls upon our ears, quickening our steps.

We arrive at the bank to receive the first shock of disappointment ; the river is full and discoloured, in hopeless condition for the fly, but we have come to fish, and so we put up the ever-willing rod. Now the advice we have received is to the effect that sombre flies, small in size and of simple dressing,

are here required, but such would be invisible in the murky waters. We select for our first inspection of the glorious pool a more gaudy confection, a Silver Doctor in fact, as being certain to prove more easily seen. A salmon splashes noisily in mid-stream, and we cover it carefully, hanging the fly over the lie a long time and several times, but no huge boil or angry snatch comes to send a shiver down the rod and the thrill that knows no equal. Time and again we are given a mark to which to send the fly, but the result is still the same, and then it becomes apparent to us that we are suffering not only from the cloudiness of the water, but also from the fact that, by the time the fly reaches the boil, the fish is no longer there to receive it. Every plunge is followed by a forward lunge; the salmon are running. Our hopes fade away, the sense of disappointment is keen, but still we cast on and on, enjoying the sweet working of the rod and its management of the long line as it lays the fly softly under the far bank and brings it round in graceful sweeps to our own. Fish are showing in amazing numbers, and that fact keeps us plodding cheerily away, every cast full of expectation. We fish down the long stretch again with a Dusty Miller, and again in desperation with a Silver Wilkinson. A little encouragement comes our way, a bright, lively whitling making an effort to seize the unequal lure, but, though we cast with renewed vigour for a time, it is only for a time, and we are glad to seek rest and shelter from the broiling sun in the shade of an ancient oak, while the salmon continue to plunge about and tantalise us exceedingly.

We know that we have been wasting energy casting

the futile fly, but it is better to fish and catch nothing than not to fish at all. Moreover, salmon are queer creatures that obey no rules. The possibility is ever present even in a flooded water that one swimming high will see a fly struggling across its path and seize the glittering prize, or that one lying low will be irritated by the energetic object continually invading its domain and seek to remove the disturber of its peace. So we persist, hoping that some time luck will bring together at one moment all the necessary factors required to produce the desired result. To-day the hope is vain.

After our rest, and as we begin to select another fly, chosen not so much for the purpose of arousing the interest of a salmon as to supply us with an incentive to further labours, our host arrives upon the scene. His opinion on the question is quite emphatic—the fly is useless, the minnow will kill a fish. That verdict coincides with our own, and yet we are able to spend days and days casting a fruitless fly before having recourse to the less sporting lure. Why that should be we know not, and probably as time goes on we may become less fastidious. No doubt a salmon is a salmon no matter with what lure its capture is effected, but method appeals to us quite as much as, or even more than, the captive. He confidently declares that before he has travelled five yards down the bank he will hook a salmon on his Silver Devon, and he keeps his promise. Not half a dozen casts does he take before he is fast in a fish, in a piece of water, too, over which we have already worked in every conceivable manner a large assortment of flies. We get ready the gaff, select a suitable stance, wait until with master

hand he plays the fish to our station, and in an incredibly short space of time we hoist in triumph on the bank a plump ten-pounder.

The sight of it is sufficient to make us throw all our prejudices to the winds and we betake ourselves to where the basket lies. That roomy receptacle carries many things to the river and loch which are usually unnecessary, hosts of appliances which make us ready for nearly all emergencies, many of them never used. We are not surprised on finding a Blue and Silver phantom and a steel trace, remnant of some weary Loch Lomond day. It seems sinful to harass the beautiful rod with such a weighty combination, but the fish lying on the bank helps us to overcome such feelings. Greatly do we desire a similar trophy; the feat is possible; we have actually seen it done, and soon we are spinning the minnow and searching the pool in company with the deadly Devon.

Our luck is not yet in, and off we go to another pool half a mile away in hopes of finding it. We like this cast even better than the last; a strong, deep current flows right through it, fine water in which to work either fly or minnow, lively water that gives life to the lure. Its appearance and character attract so much that we are almost persuaded to try the fly again, but refrain. The first trip down yields nothing, and we decide to fish it once more with the minnow sunk as much as we can manage. A fine sea-trout gleams bright momentarily beside the revolving lure, but fails to take a hold and we concentrate all our attention on laying the minnow gently on the water, sinking it deep and subjecting



THE GENEROUS POOL ON BONNIE DOON.

it to long, slow draws, short, sharp jerks across and through the current. It stops. The signal passes. The rod lifts to the resistance, a broad tail thrashes the water, and we yell to our companion upstream that a salmon is on.

We reach comfortable ground, and with rod held high try to prepare ourselves for any tricks and contortions that may be displayed. The fish turns out to be a dour fighter, unwilling to undertake a frantic rush down or up the water; it prefers to lie on the bottom and escape the strength of the current, but we prefer that it should be kept moving, as otherwise the fight will be prolonged indefinitely. Slowly we work down below it, and rod pointing down and across stream we put on the side-strain that soon tells the tale and moves the anchored fish. It rises to the surface and lashes wildly about, sinks again for ease, but again that is refused. Then there is a great splashing and writhing, which is all to the good if the hold is secure, and of course of that we cannot be certain.

The battle is drawing to a close, the fish showing signs of exhaustion, giving now only spasmodic and weakening lunges, and still we compel it to come down. Here in our ignorance of the river we make a serious mistake in that we take it into too shallow water, a blunder that may prove costly; but, thanks to the sturdy rod and the trace of twisted steel, we are able to hold it there, waiting for the end. The miserable gaff fails in its office, giving way at the socket, but our luck, though long delayed, is in to stay, and the fish, not without much scrambling and wetting of feet,

is unceremoniously bundled into safety. A magnificent cock fish of 15 lb. it proves to be, with the fighting hook of the under jaw greatly developed, a great and powerful prize, worthy termination to long, laborious toil. Our only regret is that we did not capture it on the fly, in which case it would probably have yielded longer and more lively sport, but our conclusion is that in future we shall make certain that the creel contains an assortment of minnows of various types and sizes.

We gather up the apparatus and the spoils of victory and wend our way slowly back to our starting-point, but in the process we discover and linger within an old orchard, no longer cared for or tended. Here we find to our amazement beautiful rosy apples and plums, with which we assuage the awful thirst which always comes to every angler by the river. All around is an astonishing crop of brambles ripening under the September sun.

When we arrive our host expresses his delight and satisfaction at the good fortune that has attended us, and informs us that in our absence he has played and lost another salmon. We try the pool again, but in rather careless fashion, for we feel that we have sufficient reward already and little energy for more effort. Were the water to clear ever so slightly we might put up a fly again, but since conditions remain unfavourable we turn our back upon the river, hoping that some day we may renew acquaintance with its sparkling streams and pools.

Truly the angler's life is a happy one, spent as it is by the sweetly flowing river and the rippling loch, amid scenes that are ever delighting the eye and compelling admiration. From early spring,

with its promise of life, until late autumn, with its abundant fruits, he plies his art, and every period of the changing year as it comes is the best because it is the present. September, "the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness," is a glorious time in which to seek and search the waters, for though then, it is true, the nimble yellow trout, which has afforded us sport throughout many months, begins to busy itself with domestic cares, its place is taken by the gallant sea-trout and the noble salmon, which come up fresh from the sea to fill us with hope, hope accompanied always with fears, fears that are followed, if the fates are kind, by triumphant victory.

CHAPTER XXXII

DRY-FLY OR WET-FLY

THERE is a school of anglers known as the Dry-Fly Purists, who assign to themselves a position of vast superiority over other devotees of the gentle art and consider themselves as alone worthy of notice and respect in the angling world. They regard the floating fly as the only legitimate lure, all others being, in their opinion, base and mean, and look down upon those who use them as being but little removed from the category of poachers. Not only do they restrict themselves as to lure in this way, but they even go so far as to refuse absolutely to cast a fly into any promising spot and confine their attentions solely to trout which they have observed rising to the natural insect. If by any untoward fate a sudden puff of wind unforeseen and consequently not allowed for should waft the fly of a Purist a foot from off the straight path and cause it to alight just on the nose of another hungry trout eagerly awaiting such a windfall, he would return such a capture carefully to the water, or peradventure he might be tempted by its beauty and grace to carry it home, but woe to him if he failed to resist, for his conscience would give him no peace until it had hurried him into an early grave.

At the opposite end of the long line of fly-fishers are to be found those who affect to describe dry-fly fishing as merely ridiculous nonsense, and who openly declare that though the floating fly may possibly be of some avail on southern waters, it is entirely out of place and totally unnecessary on the sparkling streams of Scotland. They as a rule fish with a rod of such dimensions as can give little pleasure even to one of herculean strength, and with a casting-line bearing upon it four, five, or more flies, dressed generally with wings which stand stiffly apart, even when being tossed down a rapid, waving, broken stream. By far the great majority of them start at the neck of a pool, cast across and down, allowing their lures to be borne naturally downwards (a few pull them unnaturally upwards), and their efforts are occasionally rewarded in some small degree when the conditions are very good.

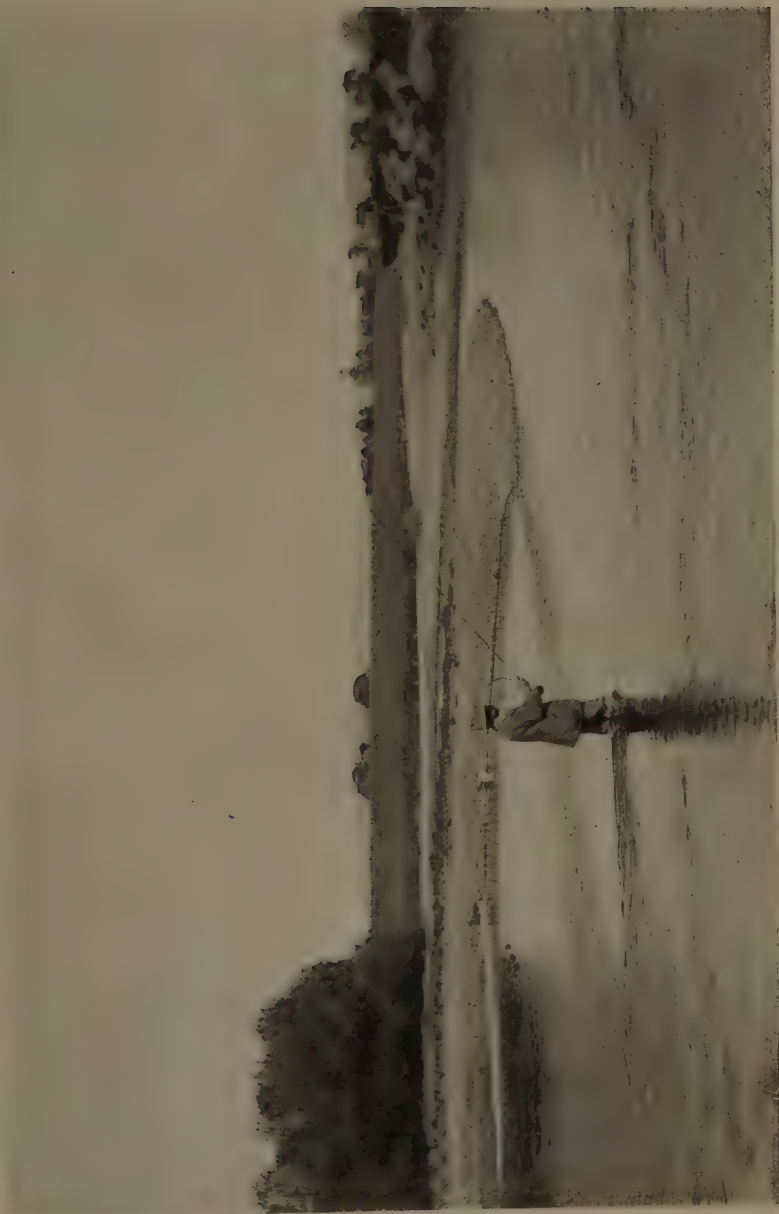
These are the two extremes, and neither understands the art of using to the greatest advantage either the dry- or the wet-fly. The first class is possessed of infinite skill, masters of the rod, adepts at casting into the most awkward corners under most adverse conditions, and able, moreover, to learn, if they would, all branches of trout-angling in a very short time, whereas the second class is lamentably ignorant, as otherwise they would have changed their methods years ago. As usual, the correct course to pursue lies between the two, and the fact is that neither the dry- nor the wet-fly can claim any prolonged superiority over the other.

We must postulate that the aim of every angler is to catch fish and as many of them as possible above the limit size prescribed either by himself

or the association which manages the water fished. Wherever a limit basket per day is fixed, then we assume that the more frequently that figure is reached the better pleased is everybody concerned. If it should happen that owing to modern improved methods too many captures are being effected in any club water, then a revision of the rules will soon mend matters. In course of time as the angler's skill increases and success becomes quite an ordinary occurrence, he loses inevitably the desire for numbers, and in its place is created an ambition for quality, so that in most cases new regulations would not even then be required.

The realisation of consistently good results can be accomplished only by a judicious use of both types of feathered lure, each at its own appropriate time. There are days, or rather periods in a day, when one is superior to the other, and to discover which one it is should never present any unsurmountable difficulty. How often have we heard the wet-fly angler give as the cause of his failure a superabundance of flies on the water? Quite as frequently the dry-fly man will explain away the meagre weight of his creel by remarking on the scarcity of insect life which was the main characteristic of his day. If these two men had exchanged either days or methods they would most probably both have had a different tale to tell, although it is agreed at once that there are too many days in a season on which neither would have had very conspicuous success.

To an observer stationed at a distance of fifty yards or even less, the two styles of fly-fishing should appear to be identical, for they differ, or



FISHING THE FLOATING FLY.

rather should differ, in only one particular, viz., that in one case the fly is made to float and in the other it is allowed to sink. Perhaps the frequent false casts made by the dry-fly fisher for the purpose of drying his fly might betray him, but this is a practice often carried to excess, a single false cast being all that is really necessary to throw the water off the fly before submitting it to the trout's inspection. Moreover, the wet-fly man would find it likewise to his advantage to copy the example.

All fly-fishers for trout should cast upstream over rising or feeding fish if possible, for that is infinitely preferable as being more interesting and less uncertain, but, when unfortunately such pleasurable occupation is denied, then there is only one reason why neither should search all the most likely places which experience has shown that trout are wont to frequent. That need not be done when one is confident that a rise will occur at some period of the day, for even though it be but of short duration, it will probably yield all the sport required to satisfy anyone, provided always that he knows how to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded—e.g., by a selection of the correct lure, by a knowledge of the proper mode of presenting it, and by ability to read the signs which point to the procedure required. If a rise is expected, then each individual must decide for himself whether or not he will reserve his energies until the appointed time.

Every fly-fisher should be prepared to adopt either of the two methods which is indicated by the conditions prevailing to be the only suitable one. It may be raised as an objection that the dry-fly man's line is dressed so that it will float persistently, and

therefore is unsuited for use with the sunk fly. As a matter of fact, instead of being a handicap a floating line is a decided advantage and even almost a necessary requirement in any circumstances, as it affords immediate indication that attention has been paid by a trout to a wet-fly, and of course, on the other hand, it is absolutely indispensable when it is desired that the fly should retain a position on the surface.

It may be as well here to state what the signs are which should tell the angler how to proceed, and first we shall discuss under what conditions the floating fly will produce the greater amount of sport. Often have we heard it said that when the March Browns are out in force and trout are plunging at them in all directions it is but waste of valuable time to present one fly armed with a hook among hundreds that are not so adorned, that a number of wet-flies fished downstream will have a much better chance of attracting attention, as they search far more water and cover more fish in any given time. The same number of dry-flies, it seems to us, would be even more serviceable, for they would have the added advantage that they would be on the surface as the natural flies are.

At first glance the objection to one fly seems sensible, but a very cursory examination at once reveals the fallacy in the statement. Good fish during a big hatch of flies take up very definitely marked stations from which they do not readily move, but are apparently content to accept only such flies as pass directly over them. The dry-fly, therefore, carefully presented at the correct time, is not one among hundreds, but the only one passing at the

time in full view of the trout, and, if a good imitation as to size and general appearance and delivered with accuracy and delicacy, it will be most probably accepted without suspicion. The process can often be repeated with a dozen fish without the angler being under any necessity of changing his position. A slight change in the direction of the cast, or an alteration in the length of his line is alone required.

By attention to the plan of campaign suggested, most excellent sport will be had during the very height of a big hatch, whereas the wet-fly will produce only a few fish and much exasperation. It used to be stated that when the Greentail comes out the Tweed angler goes home, but we are certain that now, owing to the ever-increasing knowledge of the dry-fly among the men of Tweedside, the advent of the Grannom is welcomed as promising good times. The rule to remember, consequently, is that, whenever trout are rising to take flies floating on the surface, one should imitate the favourite fly as carefully and closely as possible, anoint and float the lure over the best of the rises within reach.

Even when the waters are undisturbed by the spreading rings which betray the feeding trout, it will very often prove profitable to lay a dry-fly, not exactly at random, but on likely spots well known to most anglers to be probably tenanted by good and worthy fish. Though they may not even be hovering near the surface in expectant humour, they may be tempted to accept a well-made floater passing over them, such a close resemblance in general characteristics is there between the artificial and the natural dun. A careful observer will discover that the very first arrival of a hatch of flies

is eagerly snapped up by a trout, and this fact alone should be sufficient justification for anyone adopting the procedure above advocated.

Now falls to be discussed the question as to what constitutes the favourable time for the use of the wet-fly.

Quite frequently the angler will see a boil made by a rising trout at a spot where he had not noticed a fly on the surface, but his powers of vision are not necessarily at fault, for the simple reason that there was no fly there. The trout had taken either a drowned fly or a shrimp or most probably a nymph moving upwards to undergo its transformation to the winged state. Often a fish feeding on nymphs will throw up its tail clear of the water as it turns and seizes the unfortunate creature, but that is not invariably an accompaniment of such rises, and the angler may rest assured that if he sees a few rises of this kind in a pool the other inhabitants are also darting about in full activity, each from the centre of its own allotted circle. This sort of thing occurs mostly at the neck of a pool, in a stream, or in the vicinity of weed patches, and most wet-fly anglers will agree that it is in such places that they meet with the greatest response to their efforts.

Now the great problem is the determination of the type of nymph that is occasioning this activity. One well acquainted with the particular river and the usual dates at which the various duns are wont to make their appearance may with almost unfailing certainty name it without hesitation, but if he should be in any doubt and require confirmation he may examine the water,

his waders, or a bed of weeds and find a definite answer. Partly owing to this difficulty in determining the correct lure to use scientific wet-fly fishing is really a more highly specialised branch of angling than any other. The advanced wet-fly angler of to-day imitates the chosen nymph as well as possible, and, using but a single specimen on his cast, he delivers it as delicately and as accurately as he would a dry-fly either to a feeding trout which he has seen or to a point where he thinks one is waiting for him. It is not forgotten that trout, when indulging in a banquet of this kind, are inclined to move about, but each individual fish confines itself on the whole to the immediate vicinity of its own particular feeding station. This undoubtedly adds to the perplexities of the fisher and to the difficulties inherent in this style of fishing.

The nymphal activity referred to is not always followed by a hatch-out of flies and a resultant change in the angler's methods. Possibly the nymphs change their minds, or whatever they possess in the way of an equivalent, and delay the operation they had set out to perform. Some modification in the atmospheric conditions may induce them to retire again to the shelter of the weeds and gravel, there to await a more convenient season, but that does not necessarily mean that all hope of sport is gone. There are always certain to be some fish dissatisfied with the amount of fare provided and in a humour to continue, therefore the lure resembling the nymph they have been taking will still prove acceptable.

The method of presenting this type of lure calls for some comment. Nymphs are not very agile

creatures, and yet they are not inert. They possess powers of propulsion, which they exercise, however, in vain when pursued by the trout. This movement, then, must be imparted to the artificial, and much will depend on the nature of the stream as to the procedure adopted. If cast upstream and allowed to come naturally down with the current, its capacity for alluring a suspicious, well-fed trout will be reduced, for it will appear but a lifeless thing, and therefore a little liveliness should be supplied to it. This, however, is very liable to be overdone, and it will be well to remember that the nymph is quite incapable of enormous darts of a foot or so executed at lightning speed. If the lure is worked quietly and cautiously across the front of the trout's position, care being taken to give it only a small degree of movement other than that communicated by the current, while meantime the angler's presence remains unsuspected, then the desired effect should be forthcoming.

Supposing now that all has gone well and the trout has accepted the nymph, then in all probability the efforts expended will be fruitless unless the angler drives home the hook and makes the prize his own. Herein lies one other difficulty associated with this highly interesting style of fishing. The rise, if such it can be called, is often not clearly visible. Sometimes the angler sees or imagines, as the nymph passes over the fateful spot, some momentary change in the hue of the water, or a slight humping of the surface, or, welcome sight! a flashing golden gleam, or, again, something indefinable, any one of which will cause him to add the requisite impetus which fixes the

hook where most desired. He must strike firmly on the slightest pretext, and even if he makes a mistake it is not fatal. A premature strike to a bulging fish has not the same effect as it would have on a rising trout, unless it were so forcibly done as to tear the nymph right out of the water.

A word of warning should here be given lest perchance an unwary angler should have the misfortune to throw away a glorious opportunity of indulging in a crowded hour of magnificent sport. Often on a quiet summer evening a still, calm pool may be discovered plentifully dotted over with rings caused by rising trout, and yet no flies may be discerned on the surface. Now, such is neither the time nor the place to expect nymphal activity, and, in addition, it should be possible for anyone to conclude, after a brief study of the behaviour of any one feeding fish, that the food is really floating on the surface. The rise is caused by flies, which are, however, invisible to the angler, even though he is stationed quite near the edge of the stream. The flies are spent spinners which, their life's work over, fall exhausted on the water, and their filmy, gauzy wings, carried daintily upwards when in life, are now spread out over the surface. Herein lies the reason for their invisibility, but if the angler wades out and looks vertically downwards he will then see them in numbers and be able to proclaim their species.

Now again is the time to use the floating fly, but these must be of different build from those made to represent the more opaque-winged sub-imago. The wings should be suggested by means of minute hackle-points set horizontally at right

angles to the hook. The fibres are not only very fine but are slightly separated one from another, so that rays of light striking them are broken up, giving an effect of transparency and even an iridescence. On such occasions a wingless hackled pattern might serve, but it floats rather too high in the water to meet with the maximum of success. The possibility of such an event as a fall of spinners should tempt the angler to the stream on every available evening, for fishing with these delicate lures is worthy to be classed as a distinct branch of angling, and to it we accord the foremost place of all.

Consider the circumstances under which we indulge in it. It is an evening of June or July; the sun is just sinking to rest; no breeze ripples the pool or even the feathery grasses along the bank; the air is so still that the sound made by the quivering of myriads of minute wings is clearly heard: and presently all other sounds are lost when the first plop draws back our wandering eyes to the river. The small fry must keep at a respectful distance, for to-night their elders have gone out to dine sumptuously together, and they mean to take things seriously. It will take more than the shadow of a passing martin or even a clumsy cast to disturb the banquet, but they are fastidious, accepting only the most daintily prepared morsels, but of these as many as can be brought before them.

There is yet 'another condition of things to be mentioned, one to which we are all accustomed. Many a time we seek the river and find absolutely no sign of life; nymphs, flies, trout both great

and small, all seem to have gone to sleep. We may wait for hours expectantly and yet no change may take place. Are we to return homewards without testing our fortune? The question is only ridiculous. Our advice in these unfortunate but not uncommon circumstances is to fish as hopefully and eagerly as possible with the patterns that are appropriate to the period of the season, that is to say with imitations of flies and their nymphs that have been or should have been in evidence on the days immediately preceding, to use the floating fly or the sunk nymph, whichever happens to be the type which makes the strongest appeal to the individual. Let the purist shake his head in holy horror and dub the angler a poacher as he will. A fish now and then will come to grace the creel, and quite an enjoyable day will be had beside the river.

Our object has been to show how the fly-fisher may obtain the best results and to prove that the two methods of fly-fishing are not antagonistic, but closely interdependent. Either is incomplete without the other, and consequently there need be no controversy as to which is superior.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE EVENING RISE

WHAT a host of pleasant memories and weary longing crowd upon the angler when he sees or hears the words "The Evening Rise." In winter the mere mention of them will set him dreaming of past seasons or sighing for the dawning of another; in summer they will have the effect of enabling him to suffer in silence the heat and inaction of a hopeless day, and later of hurrying him away confident and expectant, long before he need or should go, to the peaceful river or the silent loch. Whence comes this subtle attraction? It may be a common failing to consider that whatever has been is better than what is, but that is not an angler's possession. His supreme failing is to feel that what is to be must of necessity be superior to what is, for hopefulness is pre-eminently his characteristic. It is true that the evening rise may occasionally disappoint, still without a doubt it provides the most abundant opportunities the day affords. These certainly may be crowded into a period all too brief, so that one careless error in judgment, one single false conclusion may result in disaster and disappointment. The evening rise attracts because it will give what it promises if we are fit to accept.

Patiently we wait by the bank of a little reservoir some calm June evening for the coming of that quiet hour when a hush descends over the country and our hopes are brightest. Not only we await the advent of those flies that love the gloaming. All day long the wise and wary trout, ignoring the swarms of midges that besprinkle the surface, have lazily poised themselves in the cool deeps, but now they are leisurely moving towards the shallows and the shore. As the sun sets in a blaze of glory and golden clouds spread across the sky, the sudden silence is oppressive; the drumming of the snipe overhead only accentuates it; it is pierced by the squeal of the doomed rabbit when the weasel strikes the trail; again it falls more heavily than before, and we are about to flee from the uncanny eeriness of it all, when again it is broken by the heavy plunge of a trout far out, and wavelets come spreading and circling to our feet.

There is much activity beneath the waters, and soon will it reach the surface. Caddis-grubs innumerable, tired of dragging about with them their neatly curved, smoothly cemented homes, have withdrawn within, effectively barred the entrance, and for a time have indulged in rest and sleep. Now they are ready for another change, and they bestir themselves. Laboriously they extricate themselves from their secure retreat, and slowly crawl to land or boldly make the perilous ascent of a reed-stem or courageously arise straight to the surface, as their nature may decree. Safely arriving, they halt for a space and split open the enveloping pupal skin, gradually accustoming them-

selves to the great change. Long they have drawn breath from the waters, now it is coming direct, and not yet are they quite prepared, but the joyousness of flight through the gentle air is to be the reward, and they wait expectantly. At length the delicate insect emerges, and, seemingly bewildered at the new world spread before its gaze, it hesitatingly fans and tests its new-won wings until satisfied with them or, unable to delay delight further, it flutters away from its resting-place. Its powers of flight are none too good, and it blunders about searching for its mates. Now numbers of them are flying about, and many of the struggling creatures fall an easy prey to roving trout.

We have prepared our cast of two flies, one with the speckled pheasant wing and the other of corncrake with the fatal, irresistible white bar across it, and we fish them either floating or sunk—it does not seem to matter much which method we adopt—laying them carefully over every rise within reach. Soon or late, as fortune decides, is felt the thrilling resistance that sends a shock through the rod to the hand and tells that waiting has passed and action has begun. In the dim light we answer as we may every cunning wile of the plunging, leaping trout; we yield, we recover, we hold, and the fish lies securely on the dewy grass. We may encounter one infinitely desirable that refuses our choicest flies and ignores our best efforts; we may find them all rising just beyond the extreme limit of our powers; we may receive a response to every cast. There is always the glorious uncertainty to keep us hopeful while the activity lasts. A brace is great reward, for time

is our chiefest enemy ; more would make the night phenomenal, but whether we get many or none is of little moment. We always have the joy of expectation, the pleasant quiet hour beside the mysterious waters, and the long walk home under the stars.

Throughout a hot July day when the sun blazes in unclouded splendour and even to breathe is laborious, we are hard to console, and are forced to admit that patience is not an angler's virtue. The thought of the gloaming rise will, as it comes, make us happy with anticipation, and make us forget our tribulation. All day long beside the stream in the leafy shade of the trees through which the sunlight filters we while away the hours watching the column of spinners rising, falling, swinging to a breath of wind, forward, backward, up and down, caring for nought but the pleasures of the dance. Lightly they dip to the water, rise and dip again, and the whole wonderful life-cycle begins anew ; tiny heads of life sink to the gravel and set out on their adventurous, varied journey. We watch and wonder. Why is it that these fragile creatures of the gauzy, iridescent wing spend one, two, or even three years under water and then often not as many hours in the happier winged state ? Why do they not complete their lives as begun ? What reason in the divine scheme arranges for the brief sojourn in air ? Just as the seed of the thistle surrounds itself with a ball of down so that it may be wafted away on a search for a congenial resting place, so the ephemera takes unto itself wings that it may fly away to virgin waters that knew it not, to far-off tarn, to sparkling stream,

and barren pool, and make every water more beautiful by its presence.

Over the river falls the eventide. The work of the spinners is over, and down the stream they float, not gaily as of yesterday with wings acock, but spent, exhausted, lifeless.

By the edge of a favourite pool we await the signal to begin the fray. With startling suddenness all over the stream the silence and the mirror of the waters are broken not with the noisy splashing rise of the fingerling, but with that deep sucking sound and the broad whirling eddy which make the heart beat faster and create a quiver of excitement. With trembling fingers we oil the dainty little Red Quill, and after a few preliminary waves to encourage rod and wrist to work harmoniously together we dispatch it with what precision we can command across the calm water just above a promising mark. In excess of eagerness we aim directly at the surface, the fly dips momentarily, but recovers and floats steadily down, too far down ; the offended trout has refused. We impress upon ourselves the necessity of remembering to avoid this grievous fault, and at the next cast, a few yards farther on, the line shoots out horizontally, the fly hovers in air, slowly descending on its supporting wings until it lightly touches the stream. On it sails like a living thing, and, as it comes, a brown shadow, guessed rather than seen, lifts itself to intercept it. The fly vanishes from sight and the warning reel tells its tale. A downstream rush, a leap high in air, a bolt for the weeds, another leap, a painfully sagging line, and disappointment is supreme.

It is better, we say, not to begin too well, the end is



EVENING ON LONG JOHN.

all the better, but the opportunity, we know, is short-lived and comes not too frequently, therefore losses are doubly mourned. Moreover, there is always a possibility that the air will quickly cool and columns of chilling mist will weirdly waft themselves across the stream, ultimately filling the valley as with a sea. Then the trout will retire to the deeps and we shall be sent empty away, stumbling across the trackless holm to the friendly road. There is no mist to-night.

Just where the pool comes sweeping round in a great bend, a fine trout is rising steadily, confidently sucking down the spent spinners as they float overhead. It is an old friend who has defied all our finest efforts to lure him in the full light of day. In vain have we sought to tempt him with our daintiest Greenwell; long have we lain concealed among the grasses of the bank and watched in admiration; with infinite care we have worked the darting nymph before his eyes, but still he is rising in the old place to-night. Just outside the curving current he lies in deep, slack water, an extremely difficult cast, but, succumbing to the attractions of the worthier victim, we ignore many fine rises nearer at hand and essay the doubtful contest of inadequate skill against supreme cunning. The fly must be changed, its heavy opaque wings are unequal to the test, and on we fix an airy hackled pattern, light and buoyant. Drag is our foe, but a loose line, though it means conceding a point to the opponent, will overcome it, but fortune also must be kind. The wavy thread is rapidly straightening to defeat, but just as despair is about to overwhelm us the water is gently dimpled, a floating bell of air replaces

the fly, and with a cautious lift the strike is administered. The line hisses through the water and the reel protests vehemently but vainly as the trout heads for its lair with a rush that the frail tackle is powerless to stop. The rod doubtlessly curves gracefully to the strain, but we have no time to admire it, and if we had we would probably fear for its safety.

Gradually, however, by its never-ceasing pressure, it begins to compel an answer, the hooked fish yields slightly, the reel regains a little, but the next moment a headlong, downstream rush well-nigh empties it, while we reach the bank and follow in hot haste, endeavouring to keep in touch. The other trout, thoroughly alarmed, have forsaken the repast, the captive leaps and plunges, but his frantic rushes become feeble, as the supple wand with relentless persistence allows no freedom but what it must. At last the gallant fighter admits defeat. Slowly, obedient to the gentle current and the rod, he is guided down to the net which bears in triumph to the safety of the gravel the victor on many past days—a magnificent trophy.

Onwards we proceed upstream to the next favourite reach, a long deep pool at the head of which enters a broad, swinging current, where we are welcomed with what is, perhaps, the most delicious sound of the river, that made by heavy trout rising in a rippling shallow. From every corner of the pool they come eagerly to the waving stream where the earliest sedges are hatching out in numbers. Again must the fly be changed to one that represents the new arrivals. Its body is thick and rough and must be well anointed to enable it to resist the water,

while its long low-lying wings of cinnamon shade project slightly beyond the hook. Now it is sent forth with an underhand cast, so that in the shallow water the trout will not be alarmed by a glimpse of the rod. Almost every venture is rewarded with a rise that comes to nought or a fitting capture—the smaller fry must be content to remain in the pool to-night—and the take depends mainly on the duration of the rise. It seems easy work, and it is, but then again the result may easily be absolute failure if due care is not exercised both in the selection and the delivery of the lure.

And now the fading light has all but gone and the river will remain silent for a time until the night-flying insects fare forth to arouse the trout again to movement, but we need not await their coming. We have failed once or twice during the evening, but we have atoned for our mistakes, and we set out for home supremely happy in the thoughts of a glorious hour.

On the loch a July day may mean weariness extreme. Not a ripple of wind disturbs the flat expanse, the sun beats mercilessly upon us, and it is even painful to look upon the glare of the waters. Only the shimmering haze that flickers over the banks distorts the mirrored trees and rocks. A trout rises lazily afar off and we row out in pursuit, but long before we arrive within casting distance it becomes aware of the presence of danger and sinks into safety. A mile away a black line stretches across the loch. Is it the welcome breeze that comes at last? Off we go only to find the same flat calm; if it were wind it has died as it came, in silence and in mystery. We put out a useless

minnow behind the boat and, thoroughly defeated, set off laboriously for home and shade, there to await the more hopeful evening.

Once more we wander leisurely down to the shore, and though appearances are but little changed we are bright with a new eagerness. Along the high western shore the waters are deep and black ; the playful coots have ceased to chase each other in and out the reeds ; the calm still prevails, but we push off expectantly. One by one the lesser heights become dim and the shadows creep slowly up the mountain-side until only the tip of the topmost crag is aflame. Soon it, too, appears clear cut against the sky ; the heron flaps its way homeward ; the woods are silent ; the day has sunk to rest, but the flies are awaking. As if with one accord they arrive, the myriad hosts of the Evening Dun. Mysteriously from the quiet waters they come, covering the boat in every corner, our hands and clothes, and even the rod. We are too busy watching them to note the first glad welcome from the trout. The infinitely fragile creatures, one would say, could not survive the faintest zephyr, and vain it were to imagine that human hands could hope to fashion anything resembling to the slightest degree these extremely delicate atoms. We are filled with wonder, but even yet the miracle is not completed, for, as we watch them, the frail insects, as though they had not yet reached a perfection beyond understanding, withdraw out of themselves and we are left contemplating the empty husks. Off they boldly fly, marvellous living things of wings of translucent purity, with but one desire in the short space allotted for their sojourn in the still air.

The loch is seething ; the trout are not taking time to rise, for rising would necessitate falling and involve a serious loss of precious time and rare opportunities. Instead they swim with open mouth along the surface scooping up the dainty morsels in hundreds. The very bank is obscured, and we see as through a mist darkly. The hum of innumerable wings is not even lost amid the noise of the splashing below. Not a point can we find unoccupied. Our fly—a light, delicate creation we thought it—floats a huge unwieldy bulk among the millions of minute lives ; there it floats, conspicuous but ignored, as if it existed not. Round about it the gorging trout gather in the harvest of the water and the loch rocks under a sky innocent of the merest breath of wind. Our hoped-for evening rise has come, but its excessive excellence means that we are vanquished.

So it would appear, but it is not the first time that we have been fated to encounter such a display of lavishness on the loch, and we have frequently learned that a little experimenting may be the means of converting absolute failure into comparative success. Some late straggling nymphs are certain to be still rising from the depths and striving to join the throng above, and trout, wearied of feasting, if that is ever possible, or crowded out from the surface, may be tempted to throw themselves on these now rarer objects. Arguing thus, we accordingly take in our unavailing fly, remove nearly every fibre of its too abundant wings, and pay it out astern until thirty yards of line lie submerged between it and the boat. Slowly we row along the shore a tortuous course, with progress scarcely

perceptible, and every now and then we give a touch to the rod which the answering point communicates to our darting nymph. On we go, none too hopefully, but glad to be doing and trying something while still the exasperation continues all around. With straining eyes we watch the curving rod and begin to realise the fascination exercised by a painted float ; our thoughts wander to those patient souls who rejoice to while away the hours by the banks of placid canal, who know not the joy of curbing the wild leaping trout, or of fighting the strength of the silvery salmon, and we can enter into their delights, for we are learning the charm of it all.

Our eyes wander at times to the troubled surface, to the great dark majestic peaks, to the landing-stage, but ever they are dragged back by the irresistible attraction of the rod-point. At length, when we have almost ceased to expect it, it bends, quivers, and bends again, the line grows taut, the reel gives tongue. We are fast in a fish. Up we stand to play the plucky half-pounder, determined to bestow upon it as much care as ever we gave to any fish, weightier by far, but never so entirely necessary as this one. We give when we might safely take ; our patience, usually absent, is now, we think, exemplary ; we are in no hurry, for the prize is at present the most desirable on earth. After a prolonged fight the nimble trout exhausts itself, and at last glides into the dipping net. Despair gives place to happiness.

Greatly encouraged in what seemed a hopeless task we continue, though now little of twilight remains, and as we venture perilously close to a bank

of motionless reeds the rod-tip shakes once more. Our lucky nymph has claimed another victim. A further exhibition of caution and patience ensues, and presently two fish are dimly gleaming side by side on the thwart.

And now the light has gone and summer darkness has descended over the loch; the waters are again untroubled, and we row thoughtfully ashore perfectly contented with a paltry brace of half-pounders taken from among thousands of feeding trout. Perhaps we should feel disgraced, and instead we are quite proud. Had the rise been only moderate, the creel would probably have been full to overflowing, but satisfaction varies not always with the result, but sometimes with the difficulty experienced in obtaining it. Even without the welcome brace the evening must have remained a happy memory, for again we had been privileged to watch the transformation of the marvellously delicate Pale Evening Dun.

It may be superfluous to say that a rise does not occur every evening even in June and July. There are many conditions which altogether prevent it beginning or bring it to an abrupt termination when well begun, but prediction has usually a fair certainty of being correct. If a strong wind prevails during the day and falls to a gentle breeze towards sundown or fades entirely away we would set out full of hope and confidence either to loch or river. If the day were calm and very bright, and the sky without a cloud, we should have grave doubts about our prospects of success, as after such days the fatal mist is almost sure to appear. That, however, has not always a disastrous effect, for we have distinct recol-

lections of wonderful sport one July evening on the highest reaches of Clyde when the mist lay white and dense over the holms and trout came eagerly to the fly until the intense coldness drove us homeward. As we have seen, the gloaming rise may at times prove altogether too good, but that is simply because we have not yet discovered materials or acquired sufficient skill in the use of those we have to enable us to manufacture a fly which will pass as a living insect when these are present in incalculable numbers. Even then perseverance may meet with fair reward, but the angler who can watch for an hour his fly passed and ignored by hundreds of feeding trout, must have that quality developed to an astonishing degree.

The fisher is not a stranger to disappointment, for trout have a way of upsetting his most careful calculations, of shattering his most cherished theories, sometimes behaving in a manner beyond his understanding, seldom acting as expected, which means, of course, that he is not yet fully versed in the mystery of the waters and possibly he never will be, so that his aim should ever be to seize with eagerness any opportunity presented of even a single hour with the rod. Especially must he not neglect the frequently fruitful gloaming rise. Should he find that it does not occur as anticipated, still is the time pleasantly spent in the beauty and peacefulness of evening, while if it should come to pass and his hopes are sufficiently realised, then is his joy infinitely increased, and he turns homewards filled with a great contentment.

CHAPTER XXXIV

BRIDGES

THERE must be something peculiarly fascinating about a bridge which spans a stream, something about it that attracts not only anglers but other less fortunate men as well. Where is it that the villagers are wont to meet to discuss the news of the day, to put the nation to rights, to relate or hear the latest interesting item but on a bridge? The village that is so unfortunately situated as not to possess such an estimable meeting-place suffers a grievous handicap in the struggle for existence, and it will be observed that its inhabitants are silent, sullen, and discontented. Curiously enough a bridge has no attraction for women; they never collect there to gossip. It is the preserve of the men, and there they foregather of an evening and lean against it or hang over it and while away the hours.

Whenever an angler sees a bridge, be it an old favourite on a well-known stream or a new friend on an unfamiliar water, his hopes revive, his step quickens, he even passes over quite a promising stream or glide in his eagerness to lay his fly beneath the arch. Why should such things be? A bridge is very often, nay, usually, thrown across a burn or river just at a fine pool or probably in some

instances it is the cause of the pool's formation. In times of flood the water in its headlong rush becomes suddenly arrested by the supporting pillars, and concentrating its powers scoops out gravel and sand and hurries these farther down the stream. The consequence is that a fine retreat is provided for the trout, which soon discover in their migrations up and down the river such comfortable abodes, and there they sport, retiring when alarmed into its protecting shade. In course of time the submerged portions of the bridge become hollowed out by the water's action, and there are furnished secure retreats for lordly fish.

We never passed, and we suppose no angler, whether prepared with all his accoutrements for the fray or not, ever passed a bridge without peering over into its depths to watch the trout poised against the current, rising leisurely or in haste, moving to this side and that to pick up some morsel borne along, butting at intruders on their special preserves. There may we learn much about their methods of feeding, the most favoured stations, and admire or wonder at the protection given by their colouration. At first not a single trout is visible, but in time the eye learns to pierce the water, and assisted by the fin movements becomes able to distinguish not one but many fish. Presently perchance we may see approaching the deep-flowing current at the neck a shadowy, graceful form, a grayling, with huge dorsal fin fully expanded, reminding us of a yacht in full sail. He is solitary now, but later, when the first September frosts brush the grasses of the holm, he will join up with the shoals seeking out their swims. A little creek is black with a crowd of minnows stemming the trickling inlet, nosing curiously

every stone and weed, darting away in confusion and with much splashing should a martin swoop along or possibly for no other reason than their own joy of life.

From our youth up these bridge-pools have exercised a great influence over us. We can remember well that in these early days there was impressed upon us the supreme importance of keeping out of sight of the fish we hoped to catch, and almost at once we became alive to the fact that this could easily be accomplished at a bridge. We can see ourselves yet making cautious detours, unnecessarily long undoubtedly, approaching these fruitful spots with noiseless tread, lowering the protesting worm, and watching carefully from round a corner the rod-top which quivered with our excitement.

Once we heard that the maggot was an irresistible bait and we promptly acquired some—the method we shall not relate, but we admit that we would not now use it—and we repaired with added hopes to a little tributary of the South Queich, feeling certain of a great basket. It is but a mere ditch so overgrown with grasses, rushes, and meadow-sweet that the water in most places is invisible, so much so that we used to repeat the cast, if such it may be called, when we failed to hear a resounding plop, showing that the bait had reached its goal.

That day we went straight to the bridge, where there was open water and where we felt sure a big trout had its lair. The hook was a fairly large one and, with the object of making the lure specially attractive to the hoped-for monster, we fixed transversely upon it as many maggots as it would hold. Certainly it was a savoury mouthful that we, concealed behind the parapet, dropped in below the bridge, but it was swallowed up by a six-inch sprat, and in disgust we threw the vile grubs away and stuck to our well-scoured

lively worms. This same bridge yielded us many good fish, one even of three-quarters of a pound, which had come up, we were informed, from Loch Leven for some occult purpose not then understood by us.

Another bridge that we often see in memory is the Barrel Brig near the source of the Black Devon. It is not a bonnie bridge by any means, the gully of the stream being filled up with earth and stones faced with mason-work, and through this passes a huge cylindrical pipe, from which the water falls from a height into a great pool cut from the peaty soil. Why should it be remembered with pleasure? Thither we went one April day with a rod and our first cast of flies and we thrashed that pool for hours until it seemed to us that the line was flying out fairly straight and alighting with sufficient gentleness. Then we passed downstream to the next pool, where we caught our first trout on the fly and we bore it carefully home proud of a great achievement.

There was, and probably still is, a footbridge over the Kinnel Water far up the glen, where it is but a prattling burn. It crosses over a most beautiful pool, densely surrounded with low-hanging trees, through which the sunlight filters, lighting up the sparkling gravel and revealing many trout of a size and quality one would not expect to find in so small a water. The reason for their presence was obvious; the trees rendered the pool unfishable, or so it seemed to casual observation. These trout, however, aroused our desires, and we could not content ourselves to leave them in peace; they could be caught, if only we could devise the method. Carefully we mounted the bridge and, screened from view by the foliage, we lowered through the branches nearly to the surface

a hook baited sometimes with a grasshopper and sometimes with any large fly we could capture.

The wind blowing through the bridge wafted the bait hither and thither across the pool, and the trout, so unsophisticated were they—probably never before had their domain been invaded—collected from all corners and followed its erratic orbit. It would have been a serious error in tactics to have allowed the bait actually to touch the water, as then it might have been snapped up by some audacious youngster. The victim was selected, and at the critical moment the lure was dropped in front of it. Then there was a scurrying to and fro, the other fish, despised for the nonce, fleeing in all directions, while the captive tore off this way and that, but for such a game the gut employed was of the strongest, and after a while the trout lay utterly exhausted, absolutely motionless.

The landing of the prize presented difficulties somewhat new, but these were overcome. The fish was gently piloted past all grasping twigs until it was vertically below, then the line was caught, rod laid down, and slowly and carefully the trout was hoisted up hand over hand into safety. After an hour's rest another could be caught in similar manner, and so we gradually caught all the best trout the pool contained. Further down the Kinnel a road crosses, a good twenty feet from water to parapet, and there also we put this novel method into practice, not that it was necessary, but because it was so highly successful. There, however, we always elected to scramble down from the bridge to the bank when we hooked a fish, and much excitement was in consequence added to the sport.

Far up Tweed is old Stanhope Bridge, near the junction of the prolific water of that name, a very different structure from the new concrete erection which has replaced it. Its massive wooden supports still resist the great floods which hurl their powers upon it. There dwells a mighty trout, old and wary, which has defied for years all efforts that have been directed towards its capture. Not once but many times it has been hooked, but at the first touch of the steel it, unlike the inexperienced salmon, realises at once its peril and bolts with a rush that nothing has stopped to the fastnesses among the accumulations of weed and wire that plentifully adorn the piles. Still we hopefully approach the bridge, and cautiously mounting it we mark the exact location of our heart's desire. Almost in fear we spin the flashing minnow across his range, and though we fail to persuade him to accept it we are not disheartened. Some day he may take it and we may have luck enough to keep him from all dangers, but if not we still have the glory of the chase, its chiefest reward alone denied.

And so we might continue to enumerate bridges which we have encountered throughout our fishing years, some of them memorable because of outstanding successes or happy experiences, and others equally noteworthy in that they have been witnesses of our inglorious defeat. We cannot think of a river without picturing to ourselves the bridge, where, when the day begins full of hope and expectation, we shall put together the little rod, to whose shade we shall retire in the heat of noon for rest, refreshment, and the pleasant conversation of our brother anglers, and from which, as the shadows lengthen, we shall take our last look at the flowing stream.

CHAPTER XXXV

BIRD-WATCHING

THE angler's day is not exclusively confined to fishing. On the way to and from the water, during the many hours spent in the silent solitudes of the hills, while resting on the bank awaiting patiently the advent of the first fly, forerunner of the hatch which fills the river with life, he finds many distractions, which constitute one of the chief attractions of his pastime. He must of necessity tarry by the way or stay his curving line to watch in admiration and even sometimes in amusement the birds of the moor and the river, the hill and the loch, displaying their several characteristics.

As he hurries across the holm to his chosen pool the meadow-pipit rises at his feet, betraying the site of its nest of dark eggs; the lapwing wheels and swoops upon him; the grouse flutters along the ground, trailing a broken wing, seeking to deceive; the snipe from a clump of rushes dives, turns, and twists, twists and turns again; the blackcock with his mate rises heavily from the thick cover of rough meadow-grass; the lark, a speck in the blue, floods the moor with melody, but the sweetest music, sweeter even than song

of triumphant reel, is the clear, eerie whistle of the wild curlew. Through the long winter months that is the song we hear in memory, and when April comes with its awakening sunshine we leave the city behind to enjoy the wild notes once more on the breezy uplands. Then we meet again the dipper, who curtseys us a welcome from his water-worn boulder, accompanies us up the burn, giving us a little song now and then, until he arrives at the boundary of his domain, when he leaves us, and another, who permits no trespassing, takes his place.

Now we wander, rod in hand, by the banks of lonely mountain tarn or weed-girt reservoir. Out in the centre little grebes whistle contentedly all day long, coots chase each other out and in the reeds, ducks of many varieties sport about at safe distance. Anchored to the submerged branches of some overhanging bush we find a mass of rotting weeds, not wafted there, however, by wind and wave, but carried with care by a pair of grebes. If we remove the top covering we disclose the eggs, both probably stained and discoloured by the rotting accumulation which conceals them, but one of them may still be glistening in its snow-white purity.

By the margin of a beautiful little pond, well stocked with sporting trout, we once discovered a wild duck's nest, the eggs carefully covered over with fluffy down torn from the mother's breast. We were busy examining these, when we were subjected to a spirited attack from the angry mother, from which we smilingly retreated in good order. Later in the season the family would put out from the bank as we approached, and would pass the

time in pursuit of flies or in little adventurous excursions under water. We have even met them up the burn, when the mother would display great alarm and excitement, but the young ones would sink and run along the bottom for a yard or two, and so to safety.

There is one bird of the waterside which, though we like well to see it when not in fishing mood, seems to delight in annoying us, and that is the water-hen. Cautiously we approach the willow-shaded pool, where the big trout lie. A floating bubble of air marks the place where a fly has disappeared for ever. We work ourselves into position, estimate with care the length of line required, dispatch the anointed fly on its mission, when out from the roots scuttles a water-hen, scaring the trout into the depths. The bird is laughing at us, and we cannot retaliate, for it is snug within the shelter of the rushes of the farther bank. It is only an irresponsible practical joker that we must learn to tolerate, for we would never dream of using any harsh measures. It is not a cormorant.

Another bird which does its utmost to deprive us of our sport is the heron, a rival angler to whom, however, all days are alike good. As we round a bend of the river we discover him standing motionless by the mouth of a tributary burn. He is the personification of patience; he knows how to wait, and that waiting pays. He never goes home in the gloaming with an empty creel. Some there are who would like to have him exterminated, but, though he can do amazing damage to a river, we consider that his removal would be a calamity. We would not have the most picturesque of our

riverside birds utterly wiped out of existence, but at the same time it would certainly be foolish to allow them to become more numerous. We are always amazed to find the speed at which the slowly flapping wings carry the heron along. We have never had the good fortune to witness a heron in the act of making a kill, which, in spite of the fact that the bird is difficult to approach, is surprising, for it is credited with having an enormous appetite, and therefore opportunities should be frequently afforded.

During the course of our fishing career we have hooked and landed quite a variety of birds, martins, a blackbird, and, greatest prize of all, a wild duck. The last was taken on the worm in our youthful days in a small stream overgrown with rushes and meadow-sweet, amongst which the unfortunate victim must have been lurking. The blackbird was captured similarly on a burn in Bute; it had apparently been perched in a bush overhanging the water, when the worm, poised uncertainly in mid-air for a moment before being lowered to the pool, attracted its attention. Martins are frequent captures. Often when dry-fly fishing on the Clyde we find our floating lure receives much notice from them. It is amusing to see them swoop down on the water, pick up the fly and cast, and hastily drop them again. Not one has been caught in this way. It is when we are moving from one pool to another, and the cast of flies is streaming in the wind that we have to halt and release a swallow or sand-martin. They are not hooked; they seize the fly and become entangled in the cast. Some anglers can tell of capturing lapwings in the same

way ; others have hooked seagulls on the minnow spun behind a boat with a view to luring a trout, but such big game has never come our way.

Many a time have we lain secluded and unsuspected by the banks of river and loch, and been privileged to view clearly some of our feathered acquaintances. Once on the river Urr, below Corsock Bridge, we saw a salmon rise in a little pool. In vain did we put our first fly over it ; then, with the intention of resting it and trying it in due course with another pattern, we retired within the shade of a tree. Almost immediately a sparrowhawk perched on a branch on the opposite bank, only a few yards away, and there in full view it preened its feathers, and, totally unaware of our presence, rested as we did. When at length it flew off upstream we left our hiding-place, and, completely forgetting the salmon, walked homewards with the feeling that we had enjoyed a glorious day's fishing.

After a hard morning's work with meagre results on the lonely Loch Maragan, high up in the hills above Strathfillan, we were thankful to cease our labours under the unclouded sky and beach the boat on the island, where, almost invisible in the depth of heather, we partook of lunch. Straight towards us from across the loch there flew leisurely a large bird, which hovered over a bed of reeds not five yards from our position. Fortune was immensely kind to us that day, though the basket was a comparatively easy burden, for the bird was a peregrine falcon, which doubtlessly coveted one of the coots or dabchicks which sport about this remote tarn.

From these heights it is a far cry to the Daer, a river whereon we have had some of our greatest days, and that of which we are now reminded was one of these. Not only was the creel filled nearly to overflowing with the truly magnificent trout of that sorely thrashed, prolific water, but as we approached one of our favourite flats a hawk with difficulty rose in close proximity to us. In its talons it carried a luckless plover, surely an unusual victim, which was so nearly equal in weight to its captor that it was only by a supreme effort, we judge, that the hawk could fly at all. Almost touching the water, it crossed the river, where we followed it, but, just as we were on the point of reaching it and covering it with the landing-net, it rose again, still keeping a secure hold of its prey. So we followed for quite a long distance, but finally, discovering or deciding the pursuit vain, we abandoned it and sought the river's banks again.

Another bird which has granted us the pleasure of witnessing it from close quarters is the kingfisher, a mere glimpse of which suffices to make an angler happy. On the rivers of Fifeshire it has often flashed by us, and on Clyde we have watched one from a lofty scaur near Thankerton, but it was on Tweed below Rachan Mill that we were given an opportunity of studying it and learning its method of fishing. Secure from observation we lay on a bank and over the brink looked down upon the beautiful creature perched on a twig beside the stream, almost near enough for us to touch it. With gaze intent upon the water, suddenly without the slightest warning it launched

itself with unerring pinion and, piercing the water, seized a diminutive trout or parr, when off it flew, a living sapphire, presumably to its nest upstream. We lay imagining we heard the welcome accorded it and our gaze must have wandered for, when we looked again, it was back on the twig as keen as ever, and again the tragedy was enacted. Three times in all it came and conquered, when its own and the nestlings' appetites were satisfied or perhaps our presence was discovered, for it did not again return. We confess that on that day the rod did not leave its case ; there are times when fishing is unnecessary.

Events such as we have here recorded live in the angler's memory, and constitute even more than great baskets the outstanding features of his angling life. The birds of the waterside are his friends, to whom he bids a reluctant farewell when the fishing season closes, and when the year once more awakens into life he welcomes them quite as much as he does the leaping crimson-starred trout that lure him so often to the soothing silences amid the hills.

CHAPTER XXXVI

MISFORTUNES

LEST it should be thought that all our days are days of gladness crowned with perpetual success in the shape of a weighty basket, and having as their invariable termination a rushing around hither and thither to distribute the spoils of victory amongst grateful friends, it may be confessed at once that defeat is not infrequent. There are days on which all energies may be exerted, the rod plied without ceasing, all the wiles learned on many waters put into practice, and yet at the end no trout glints cheeringly through the wicker-creel. Nor are these necessarily hopeless days, when the loch lies unruffled in the blaze of undimmed sunlight, or the river flows lifeless under heavy, thundery cloud-masses; conditions may be even ideal, the trout may have thrown caution to the winds, and yet results be thoroughly bad.

One July evening in Islay we went out accompanied only by a rod, reel, and single cast of flies. We wandered slowly towards a little moorland tarn in which the trout were accustomed to become lively towards sundown, but, as we had spent a strenuous day, we were not over eager. The water lay calm and still and the few stunted trees on the western

shore threw long unbroken shadows across the loch. The air was moist and warm, and though not a spreading ring disturbed the whole expanse a hatch of flies, followed by a strong rise, was surely promised. The very water had a trouty smell, and patiently we waited for the great event. Two visitors down for their too brief holiday arrived on the scene just when we had determined to return to the hotel. We were not unwilling to answer their questions about fishing, a subject of which they were both ignorant, and one of them asked if he might try his hand at it. Permission was, of course, granted, but the aspiring Waltonian had conceived the idea that a vast expenditure of muscular energy and a lightning rapidity of movement constituted the two essential requirements. His initial effort was disastrous, the flies and gut being immediately tied up in the finest "fankle" we ever saw. To disentangle it proved to be utterly beyond our powers, and during the attempt there commenced as fine a rise as anyone could wish to see. Great trout such as we did not know were in the loch were rising in that fearless head-and-tail fashion which rapidly fills the basket and the rod remained idle.

During a holiday on the Clyde at Elvanfoot we located a fine three-pounder in a deep, little pocket between two clumps of submerged weeds. Judging from the feeding-station it had selected, and from the fact that it was hovering in mid-water when we first saw it, we concluded that it would not scorn to accept a fly whenever there occurred a considerable hatch. We determined to devote to an attempt at its capture the whole of the first really fine

fishing day, and with that object in view studied the position carefully. Owing to the presence of the weed-beds and the confusing currents that flowed over, around, and between them bringing food from many directions to the prospective victim, it was a matter of extreme difficulty to float a fly so that it would not be subjected to the fatal "drag" until it was well beyond the fateful spot. Some study of the situation and much practice finally resulted in the discovery of the most suitable stance, the correct length of line, and the exact place whereon the fly should alight.

At length the ideal day for the purpose arrived and we lay down to await the advent of the hatch, which might or might not prove sufficient to attract the desired attention. The breeze was unfavourable in direction, but so light that it could be neglected; the sky was high and grey, the air pleasant, and three quiet, uneventful hours passed—not a single fisher arrived to disturb the peaceful pool—but then the surface was almost imperceptibly dimpled.

In the centre of the ring floated a delicate Olive which sailed along fanning and testing its wings. Very soon it was followed by many more, members of the same variety, gaily preparing for their first flight, but many of them were denied that joyous experience, for hearty rises over the pool marked their disappearance. Long before this the species of fly had been determined, a beautiful imitation was oiled and attached to the cast, and the trout was allowed to enjoy a few of the real variety before the artificial was sent out on its voyage. Steadily it bobbed along the current true to the chosen

course, never wavering to this side or that, a thing of life. The anxious seconds dragged their slow length along as the fly approached nearer and ever nearer to its goal. Up came the trout full of confidence to receive another delicacy and missed. Was ever misfortune greater? Not once but times without number have we seen a trout rise to a natural fly and miss it, but to miss ours is a calamity. The result was that the greater part of an ideal fishing day was lost, or so it seemed then, but now we recognise that the preparations, the waiting and watching, and the final experience were of infinite value. The end of the story is not yet, for on another day we came unexpectedly on the same trout dining steadily on duns and again it missed the fly.

We sometimes feel inclined to think that, though it commenced to rise with the best intentions, it took alarm at the gut or some feature of the fly and side-stepped at the last moment, but it is more comforting to believe in the other solution. In any case the days were not by any means blank, for it is but seldom that anyone will so much as raise to the fly, when waters are low and clear, a Clyde trout of such dimensions. To be subjected twice within a month to such harsh treatment is unpleasant no doubt, but hope is not entirely lost, and we shall again try and, if the fates are kinder, manage to capture yet that trout or its successor, or even both.

At the next attempt the method of attack will be entirely changed. It is often a mistake to float a fly for a long distance over water that is intensely clear and but slightly ruffled, as the

gut passing for a considerable time, as it does, between the sky and the trout must be conspicuous. We have killed some exceedingly good and wary fish rising in clear, almost currentless, absolutely unruffled water by placing the floating fly exactly at the trout's eye or even slightly behind it. If it can be done without creating the tiniest disturbance, the trout is almost certain to take it at the moment of its alighting. The fly, it must be remembered, comes into the trout's field of vision before it reaches the surface, and consequently the fish is often prepared to meet it.

There are some days on which hand and eye persistently refuse to work harmoniously together; the eye fails to pierce the water as it should do and often does, and sometimes it is the eye, and not the light, that is to blame; the passing of the message from eye to brain, from brain to hand, from hand to fly, is usually accomplished in quick time; but there are many interruptions, many places where progress may be delayed. One day on Loch Dochart some part of the apparatus, receiving or transmitting, must have been out of working order, for the strike was invariably a fraction of a second too late, and there that is a fatal fault. The most remarkable thing was that on that occasion only the best trout, half-pounders and better, were on the move, and it was extremely aggravating to turn over time after time a fish above the average for that water. Shortening of the line did not produce its usual salutary effect, and the annoyance continued for over an hour, when it miraculously ceased, and the trout began to take firm hold.

An excess of eagerness is often the cause of misfortunes. On any loch there will sometimes occur a fine healthy rise which will, however, last only a few minutes; trout are splashing about in all directions and so anxious is the angler to take advantage of his opportunities that all his movements are hurried. He does not steady himself or take care to lay his flies as neatly and delicately as is his custom, nor does he make sure that his rod, from the moment his line alights to the instant it is withdrawn, is always in the striking position. If a trout rises he hits it with excessive vigour, smashing the cast or only missing the fish; if it does not answer immediately, he is aiming, not too carefully, at another. Frequently on seeing a rise also within reach while on the point of covering another he will alter the direction of his cast, more than likely missing the mark altogether. It is easy to advise him to keep his attention immovably fixed on one point until the fish is hooked or refuses; he does not require to be told what he should do, but all anglers know how difficult it is to prevent the eye wandering when the ear informs. How many periods of glorious excitement have been utterly lost through this very tendency! All of us have suffered; some will remember having on such occasions hooked the ghillie's cap or themselves, having tied up the cast into uselessness or even taking an unpremeditated plunge beneath the wave. It is somewhat undignified and trying to the temper to have to remove one's jacket for the purpose of extracting a fly which has imbedded itself in some remote part when many critical eyes are in the vicinity, and one can almost

hear the comments made on one's piscatorial prowess.

Others have doubtlessly had misfortunes before which these fade into insignificance, but after all, what do they amount to? Have we not all had our strokes of good luck to put against them, the trout caught while we watch our partner in the boat throwing out a graceful but unavailing line, a fine two-pounder foul-hooked in the tail, two at a time on a hopeless day, a fish on the trail as we row up to the drift again, a glimpse of an otter or the shy red deer? No matter how great and overwhelming a little misfortune may seem at the moment, do we not look back with pleasure on every day spent by the water? Surely we cannot forget the fresh perfumed breeze of the moorland, the clump of sweet myosotis by the burn, the roar of the fall amid the trees, the song of the river, and the sighing of the winds in the reeds, and if the music of victorious reel be unheard for a space, soon again will it swell forth to cheer the heart of the despondent angler.

CHAPTER XXXVII

WHY SALMON TAKE

IT is now almost universally accepted that the salmon does not feed in fresh water, from which it follows as a necessary consequence that he cannot be impelled by any desire to satisfy his appetite when he condescends to accept a lure. Possibly there still remain some people who find it hard to believe that salmon can abstain from food over a lengthened period, amounting in some cases to more than a year ; they cannot understand how it is that the stomach of a salmon becomes unable to digest food as soon as the fish leaves the sea for its journey up the river. The argument which will do more to convince the unbelieving than all others which have been brought forward is that not one of our streams could supply the requisite amount of food to the large numbers of heavy fish which throng them every year. The salmon requires no food and does not feed in fresh water, for if it did the stock of food would be exhausted in very short time, and all life would be banished from our rivers. Why then does the salmon take?

Some authorities declare that he takes out of curiosity. He sees the fly or the minnow hovering before his gaze and naturally wonders what it is.

He longs to detain it and examine it at his leisure, but Nature has failed to supply him with hands wherewith to catch. The minnow persists in revolving, the fly swings across, up, and down the current, and he cannot obtain a proper view of the lively object. In despair he seizes it with his mouth, and his admirable curiosity is at once mistaken for gluttony. The poor maligned creature, with not a single thought to bestow on the pleasures of the table, is thus apt to be misunderstood. We ought to feel sorry for him, handicapped as he is, for even when he has managed to catch the object which has excited his curiosity he is unable to examine it because unfortunately his eyes are situated on the top of his head, whereas they would have been more convenient for his purpose had they been placed inside his mouth. The salmon knows this, and his intention is to kill, eject, and examine, but before that can all be done he is firmly hooked and fighting for his life.

There is another school of theorists who opine that the angler's lure irritates the salmon and fills him with overwhelming passion until, unable to restrain his temper longer, he hurls himself upon his tormentor. In support of this view one will tell how he marked down a salmon in a pool, fished carefully to it, hanging one pattern of fly after another over the lie, the fish meanwhile growing angrier and still more angry, until the limit combination of silk and feather was reached and the precise amount of irritation attained, when, of course, the woods re-echoed the wild cheering notes of the whirring, triumphant reel.

Another will relate how he carefully worked down

a glorious stream in the wake of another angler, or perhaps a dozen anglers, none of whom received the slightest encouragement from the irresponsive salmon, but the narrator, on the other hand, being the hero of the tale, succeeded with the first cast he made over the critical spot. Certainly he would not be so presumptuous as to accept his success as indicative of superior skill; he has merely benefited from the efforts of his predecessors, and but completes the good work that they began. The salmon is doubtlessly angry, but after and not before being hooked. It is a pity to demolish a beautiful theory, but the unpleasant duty must be undertaken. If this is the reason why a salmon takes, then it is a justifiable conclusion that the longer the fish remains in fresh water the easier it should be to catch him, because he sees irritating lures every day, and ought to become more angry as time goes on. He certainly becomes redder and 'ever redder, exactly the picture of anger, in fact, but, sad to relate, sad both for the theory and for sport, he becomes ever more indifferent to our lures.

We have lately learned that a new theory has been formulated, so picturesque, so homely, so pathetic, that it deserves to be accepted without examination, and we are irritated to discover that our unfortunate curiosity which has driven us to inspect it leaves us lamenting the loss of a delightful reason why the salmon accepts the angler's offering. It has suddenly been discovered that the noble fish has for centuries been cruelly misunderstood. Most of us have always had the belief that the salmon refused to take the slightest interest in the future welfare of his numerous progeny,

whereas it seems the very reverse is true, and so the stickleback is threatened with loss of its proud position as the fondest fishy parent. The salmon sees in everything that swims, creeps, or crawls in the river a potential enemy of his defenceless young, and consequently removes unhesitatingly the danger in the way. Be it noted, however, that he does not use his captives to satisfy any gross appetite ; he merely chews them, killing them over and over again as it were, and when satisfied that they are really dead and harmless he expels in triumph the empty husks. We grant that the far-seeing creature cannot possibly prevent the piquant juices trickling down his unwilling gullet during the process, and we quite realise and sympathise with him in the awful predicament which must in time confront him, viz., whether he should live up to his reputation for abstinence or try to substantiate his claim to be regarded as a provident parent. We hasten to explain that, though we have spoken only of the male salmon, the female is likewise characterised by great affection for her young and the flavour of their enemies.

From this one very remarkable fact becomes evident, and that is that the most bloodthirsty enemies of salmon ova and fry are not the same in all waters. For example, in the rivers of the South country the Brown Turkey must be removed at all costs ; in the Tay it is Jock Scott that swallows up the immature salmon ; in Loch Lomond the depredations of Mallard and Yellow are feared principally. It is needless to multiply examples. How interesting it is to note also that the enemy varies in length during the season ; in spring it measures



A DIFFICULT CAST.

from two to three inches, in summer it shrinks down to half an inch, but in autumn it grows again until it resembles its pristine self.

The closing day of the season on the Nith seemed in the salmon fisher's view an ideal one. The water was in perfect order, sky and wind were just right, and yet throughout the day not a fish could be persuaded to accept a fly or other lure. The short winter's day was fading away into dusk, when suddenly, as at some prearranged signal and without the slightest warning, every rod all up and down the river was busily engaged in fight with a mighty salmon. No one could go to the assistance of his neighbour, and the music of the waters was heard on every side. This is no new phenomenon, having been observed at some time or other on almost every river and loch in the country. Did all these fish at the same moment develop curiosity, or irritability, or anxiety as to the prosperity of their young ones yet unborn? We incline to the belief that they did not. Again, is it likely that these qualities or failings could be displayed only at certain times, e.g., when the river is flowing full and free, after a flood, when a brisk breeze ruffles the pools, when the sun is obscured, when the shades of evening begin to fall?

A fly stemming the current, a minnow spinning gaily through the pool, a worm wriggling down a stream will very probably call up recollections of days of long ago when as a happy little parr the salmon spent almost every minute of the day in incessant foraging around after things good to eat, gulping down flies of all sorts, bullying the shoals

of minnows, rejoicing to see them splash about in alarm, and swallowing one now and then. Now he is back in the same old river, very likely in the same old pool, and he plays the same old game. This theory credits the salmon with the possession of a memory, not too impossible a supposition when we consider how much there is to stimulate it. It is not even necessary to suppose him endowed with so long a memory. In the sea he lives on herring, sprats, and sand-eels, which the glittering lures may very readily suggest. The habits acquired and cultivated during two or three years of river life and one or more years spent in the sea are not easily eradicated. We are prepared to accept what scientists tell us, viz., that on entering the fresh water the internal apparatus of the salmon undergoes some change which renders digestion impossible, but the fish itself is not aware of the change. He does not know that what he eats cannot be assimilated. He has perhaps not the slightest inclination to feed, but the sight of anything bearing some resemblance to what he used to pursue with avidity is calculated to arouse within him the latent desire to capture and devour.

After a short stay in the river, during which he in all likelihood sees many lures which he ignores for one reason or another, as well as many human beings, he becomes suspicious and refuses to be tempted, however skilfully the bait may be presented. The unanimity in taking which is sometimes observed, and to which we have alluded, is capable of explanation. Trout act in precisely similar fashion, and probably all fish exhibit the same behaviour, which seems to point to the selected

moment being the favourite or regular feeding-time observed in the sea. The salmon takes the lure not because he is inquisitive or irritated or anxious about his family, but simply because the sudden sight of food reminds him of the days not long passed away when he dealt death and destruction through the hordes of terrified sprats scattering in all directions before him. His desire to eat is dormant, but can still be aroused and, provided that the river does not fall so low as to occasion him alarm, and that he is not unduly disturbed, he can still be taken by a lure sufficient to attract his attention, but not large enough to awaken his suspicion when he views it from close range.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ANGLERS' EXCUSES

MANY and varied are the reasons assigned by anglers to account for meagre results of a fishing expedition. Some of them are reasonable and readily understood and appreciated by other anglers though unintelligible to less favoured mortals, some are amusing, while others again cannot be accepted at all. As a matter of fact, all reasons and excuses are totally superfluous, for it is the quest, the preparation, the anticipation that really count, all realisation and attainment being but a pleasing incident, like a prize in a fishing competition. If it were not for the unfortunate fact that the angler returning from a day spent by loch or stream is liable to be hailed by any passing stranger and questioned as to the contents of his creel, congratulated if material results have been satisfactory, and commiserated with if they are bad, he would be quite content although doomed occasionally to be "clean." If one requires sympathy one hates to receive it, but the angler never has any need of it, which makes the receiving of it all the more odious. As Dame Juliana Berners truly said many centuries ago—"If the angler catches fish, then surely there is

no man happier than he in his spirit." Orthography has changed somewhat since her day, but the truth of her statement will remain for ever. From it, however, it is quite an unwarranted conclusion to make that without fish the angler is miserable.

There are certain weather conditions which are almost universally accepted as being inimical to the interests of the angler—e.g., thunder in the air, huge white clouds, melting snow in the river, and so on, and yet there may be found men who can tell of good sport obtained in such circumstances. As an excuse any one will serve, but as a reason none seems to satisfy every angler. It may be that a sultry atmosphere will cause trout to be dull, but, if such a condition is necessary to produce a hatch of an insect which they welcome, then there is no doubt that their lethargy will soon be cast aside. That is precisely the case with the Clyde sand-fly, which hatches out in thousands even as late as July if the day be very hot and suggestive of thunder, and its appearance is generally, if not invariably, accompanied by energetic action on the part of the trout. Again, it is on such a day in August that clouds of winged ants are usually seen, and in the dead calm which usually prevails then the surface of the pools is dimpled all over with rising fish. Cloud-masses of one kind or another may cause such variation in the light that the angler's flies and gut are rendered too conspicuous, but, provided that trout are taking the natural fly, a little study of the surroundings and a change of tactics should render sport possible. Snow-water and its effects on fish and fishing are outside our experience altogether,

Probably the most ridiculous excuse for a bad day was given by an angler whom we encountered at the foot of Midlock Water. We had had a good take off Camp, and were anxious to know what sport there had been on the neighbouring burn. His tale was a doleful one, and his basket contained but a few fingerlings, but he said that was not to be wondered at, for the wind had been blowing all day directly upstream, while he of course believed in fishing down. Similarly we once heard a miner malign our favourite pool on the Clyde. He admitted that it held a large head of fish, but, as he put it, "the wind seldom fitted it"; that is to say, it usually was against the current. Would that more pools had the same fault! Downstream fishing on small waters is the direct cause of more bad days than all the other so-called causes put together. In the long, broad reaches of the Clyde, from Robertson downwards, it is not at all necessary or even advisable to fish up with the wet-fly. It actually pays better to cast the flies straight across the stream (which can be easily done in any wind), to allow them to float naturally down for a few yards, rod-point held low meantime, and to cast again as soon as it is felt that the flies are being dragged in the current. By this means more water is covered and with less exertion than would be the case were the angler fishing up. The volume of water conceals him from view, especially if he is wading, and therefore no harm is done provided that he is not stupid enough to pull his flies up against the stream. Downstream fishing is as described, and does not, as some critics seem to imagine, consist of casting

the flies downstream and then dragging them up.

On small rivers, however, this method is impracticable when the water is low and clear, as the angler would betray his presence to every trout in the vicinity, with the result that they would flee in all directions. A case in point comes to mind. The Daer is a river which in most parts requires to be fished up, and while its trout are very ready to take alarm, they soon recover their equanimity. On one occasion an angler was resting on the bank preparing a cast for the day, when another, with some reputation, too, passed on his way upstream. The method of the latter was somewhat peculiar, because at every pool he walked to the neck and fished it down. The former, after allowing half an hour to elapse, proceeded slowly upwards, and finding sport good, returned home with twenty-two fine trout. The other arrived at the village an hour later, reporting the water so low as to be hopeless for fishing, and confessing to having landed only one small fish. So though conditions are bad, methods may make them far worse.

It is not at all uncommon to hear anglers declare that a superabundance of flies will render sport absolutely impossible. They report a phenomenal hatch, and relate that the pool was boiling with leaping trout, which, however, would not look at their lures. Now when the angler's fly is one among hundreds, and the laws of probability rule that the chance of its being taken is very slight, he should at once conclude that it is a mistake to continue fishing amid such exasperation. He ought always to bear in mind what he in all likeli-

hood knows very well—viz., that such a hatch is purely local in character and is occurring only on a single pool or at most over a comparatively short stretch. He would then without hesitation betake himself to the first pool down the river beyond the reach over which the wild orgy is being held. There a number of stragglers sufficient to occasion a more moderate rise will in time arrive, and probably he will begin to enjoy the very best of sport. Even, however, at the very height of the rise, if a really good trout is discovered feeding steadily, it will readily fall a victim to a floating fly, carefully selected and delivered, but its prospects of success will be very greatly enhanced, if it is thoroughly dry.

The opposite complaint, namely, scarcity of fly, is much more frequent and commands more sympathy. Various factors may conspire to produce such a contingency, but in the fly-fishing season a hatch is almost certain to take place at some time of the day. The angler should therefore curb his impatience, select a really good pool, and wait for it to occur. Otherwise if he roams about covering miles, he may miss it altogether by leaving it behind him or arriving after it is over. In any fair-sized river one pool is sufficient for one's needs and will provide hours of fishing, if due care is exercised and time allowed it for recovery.

Want of wind is another stock excuse for bad results, the loch-fisher especially making good use of it on occasions. As a matter of fact, however, there are times when such conditions are hailed by some with keen anticipatory delight, for on a loch at eventide a dead calm is actually to be preferred.

Imagine a little reed-girt Highland tarn at sundown, unruffled by the slightest breath of wind but dimpled all over its surface by trout rising in eager enjoyment. From the hazel-clad slopes pours forth the evensong, and the lark rises high in the heavens to receive the last beams of the sinking sun. The wet-fly angler, fearful of defeat, sits disconsolate by the bank, sighing for a breeze and worried by hordes of devouring midges, while the dry-fly man is afloat, undisturbed by their attentions, and enjoying life to the full. In the stern of the boat, slowly backed by expert oar down a bed of feathered reeds, he sits ever watchful. Over a selected fish his fly floats with deadly delicacy, again the surface is daintily disturbed, the reel answers cheerily to the strike, and a fine trout rushes wildly for its holt. When night falls, and no longer can the luring fly be seen, the angler reels up, lines his bag with fronds of fern, packs with careful hand his two or three brace of trout, and wends his homeward way contented.

Not infrequently one will meet two anglers returning from a loch-fishing expedition, during which they have shared the same boat, and will find that one has had very good sport, while the other has done rather badly in comparison. The unfortunate one may know enough to declare that his lack of success was due to the fact that he occupied the wrong end of the boat. To a non-angler such an excuse would appear ridiculous, but it is really an established fact that the chances of sport are not equal to two anglers operating from the same craft. The explanation is simple. A boat drifting before the wind is almost invariably

possessed of two motions, viz., a forward motion and another either astern or towards the bow, so that its path is not directly down wind but at an angle to it. The result is that one angler may be forced to cast his flies into water, part at least of which has already been searched by his more favoured companion. Of course, when such is discovered to be the case, equality of opportunity may be obtained by the anglers changing places at intervals, and one of the regulations governing competitions is actually to this effect.

What, then, can be considered reasonable excuses or under what conditions is it hopeless to expect sport? The question does not admit of any satisfactory answer. Even in what may appear to be impossible circumstances sport might surpass all expectations and be even phenomenal, so that though anything may, if required, serve as an excuse for a poor take of fish, nothing should be considered a reason for not fishing.

Besides those mentioned there are hosts of other excuses, but it is not our intention to expose them all, for we are very often in need of them ourselves.

THE END

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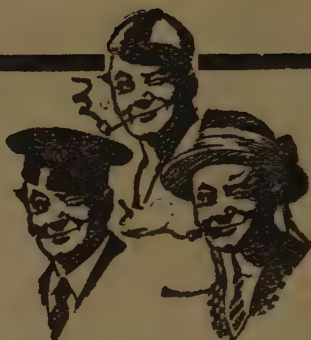
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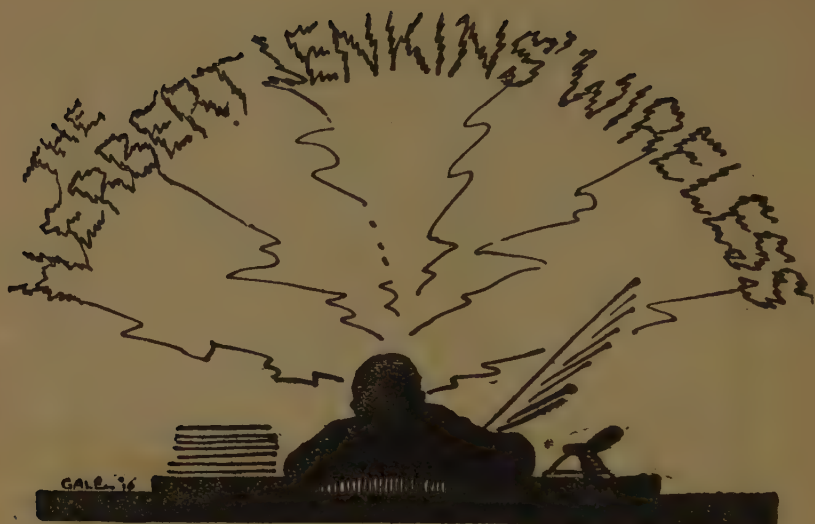
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